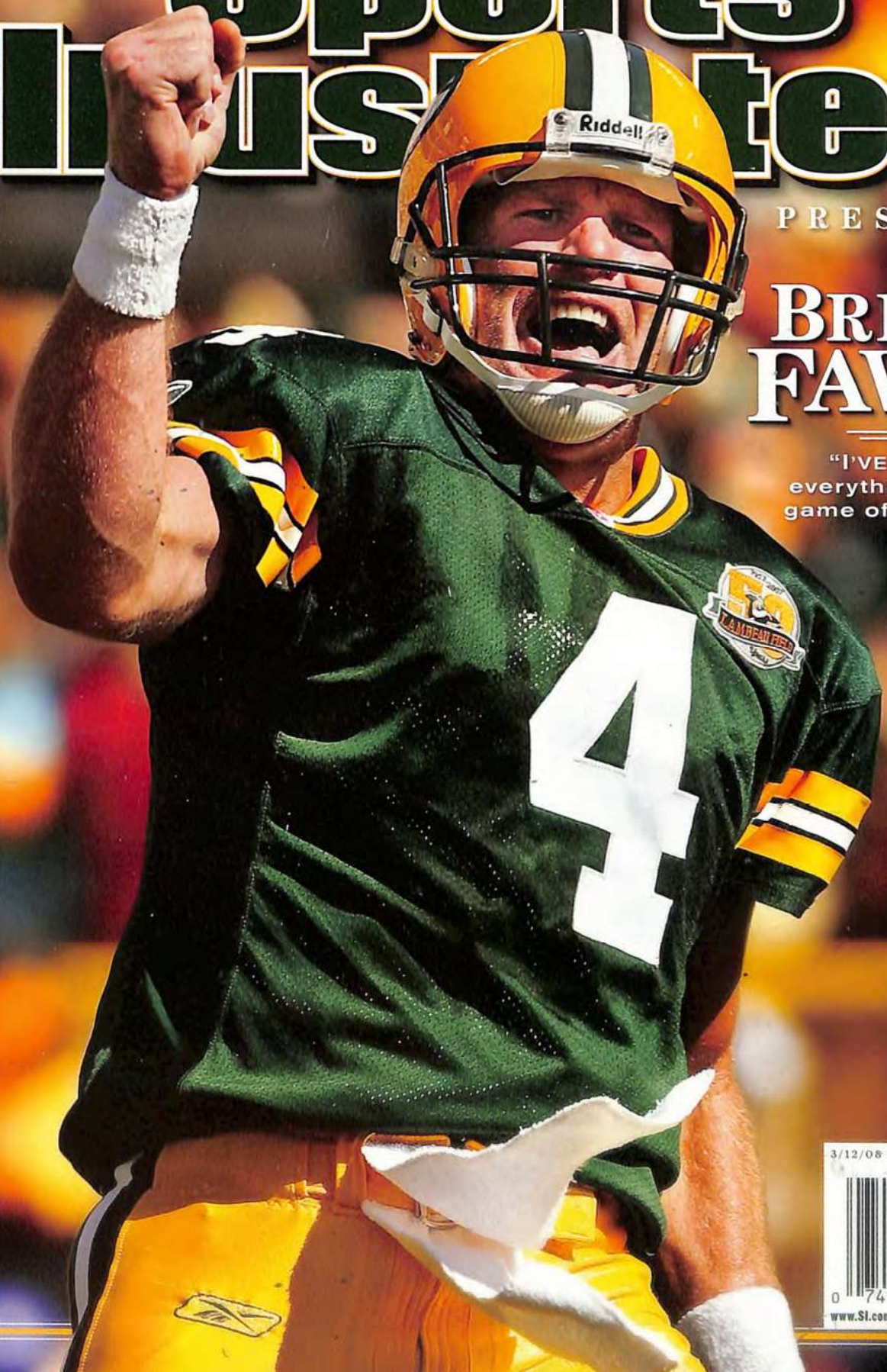
SPECIAL TRIBUTE EDITION

Sports Illustrated

PRESENTS

BRETT FAVRE

"I'VE GIVEN everything to the game of football."



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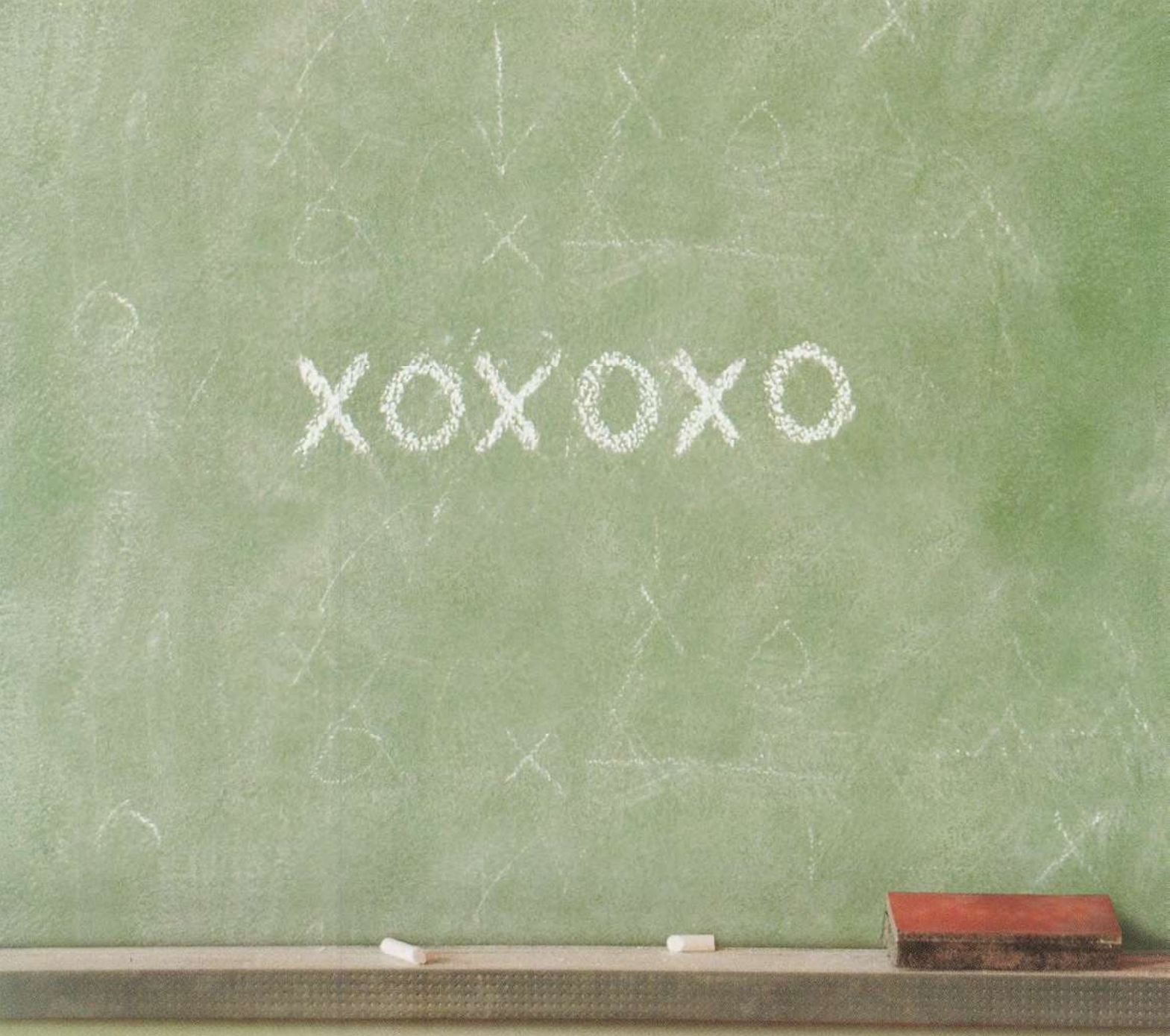

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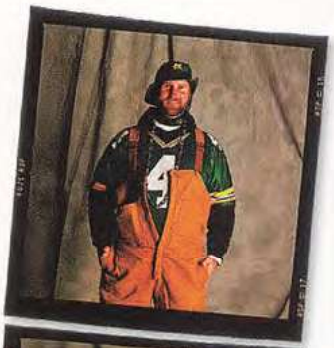

THE MAN HIMSELF JOINED IN THE FUN AS PACKERS FANS STRUCK A POSE IN TRIBUTE TO THEIR OWN FANTASTIC 4.

Cover photograph by JOHN BIEVER; Contents photographs by BILL FRAKES

Sports Illustrated
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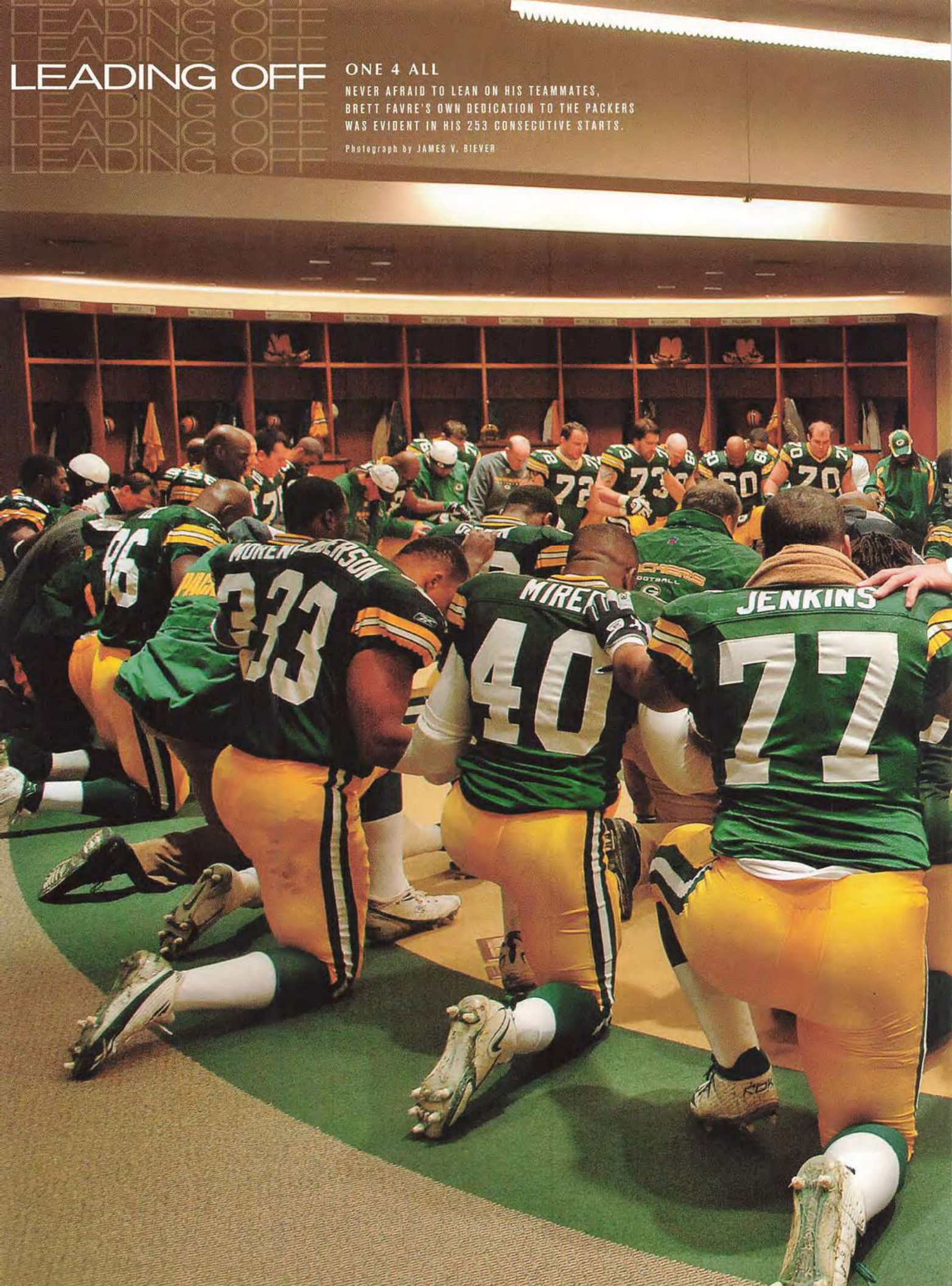
LEADING OFF

ONE 4 ALL

NEVER AFRAID TO LEAN ON HIS TEAMMATES, BRETT FAVRE'S OWN DEDICATION TO THE PACKERS WAS EVIDENT IN HIS 253 CONSECUTIVE STARTS.

Photograph by JAMES V. BIEVER



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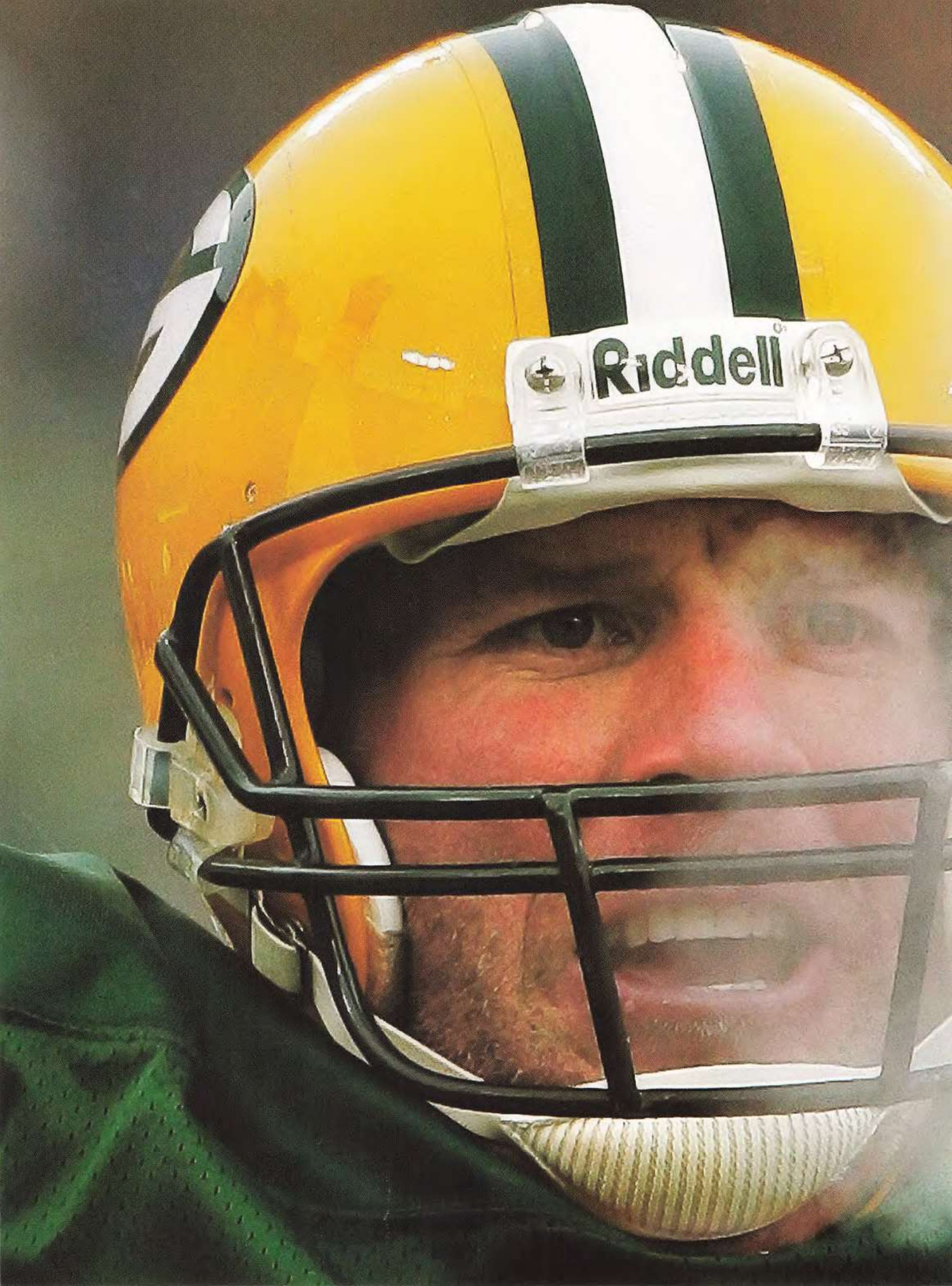
Riddell

LEADING OFF

COOL WHEN IT COUNTED

IN 16 YEARS AS A PACKER, FAVRE THRIVED IN THE BIG GAMES, LEADING GREEN BAY TO A SEASON-ENDING WIN 13 TIMES AND TO THE PLAYOFFS 11 TIMES.

Photograph by MORRY GASH/AP

LEADING OFF
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LEADING OFF

WINNER WONDERLAND

THE MISSISSIPPIAN EXCELLED ON THE FROZEN TUNDRA OF LAMBEAU FIELD, WHERE HE HAD A RECORD OF 35-5 WHEN THE TEMPERATURE DIPPED TO 32° OR BELOW.

Photograph by HEINZ KLUETMEIER

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Playing for keeps, 2006

"OPEN HIS BRETT FAVRE THE PLAYER VEINS, WAS CERTAINLY SPECIAL, AND HE'D BUT BRETT FAVRE THE BLEED PERSON IS EVEN MORE SO HONESTY"

BY PETER KING

YOU COULD WRITE THE BRETT FAVRE football epitaph many ways. You could riff on the great games and the clutch throws. You could talk to Mike Holmgren, and he would tell you how Favre grew from a maddening, impetuous kid to a maddening, impetuous—and very special—veteran. You could talk to old defensive coordinators and cornerbacks, who would tell you about the league's biggest gunslinger and risk-taker since Slingin' Sammy Baugh. You could write about the records, although he was never about the records. But as someone who's known Favre pretty well for the past 13 years, I'm going to choose a different way: I'm going to let him describe himself. Favre the player is a compelling story; Favre the man is a unique story. ¶ I first spent time with Brett Favre in 1995, when SI dispatched me to Green Bay to do a week-in-the-life-of-an-NFL-team story. Early on a Monday morning I met Favre in the Packers' offices at Lambeau Field. "Wow," he said, looking me and a photographer over. "Glad you made it all the way out to Green Bay. You mean there was nothing to write about Drew Bledsoe this week?" ¶ Kidding. Sort of. Kidding, with a point: About time you paid attention to me, because I'm going to tear up this league. He never said that, but it's what he was thinking. He led the league in sarcasm, but open his veins and he'd bleed honesty, just as he did when he announced his retirement. "I'm just tired," he told me. "I wish I had some big dramatic reason why. But I don't. I know I can still play, but mentally, I'm just drained." How do you know when to say when—when you get mixed signals from your team and you know you're still good enough to play and play well, if not as

Winning it all, 1997

Sports Illustrated
PRESENTS

Hunting, 1995

well as you did 10 years ago? How would any of us have made such a momentous decision?

That was Favre. Human.

ON HUNTING: "I love hunting. Tell you a story. Before a Monday-night game against the Vikings, we practiced Sunday morning. Beautiful day. About 60. Sunny. Everybody in town must have had the same thought I did—maybe this is the last good golf day of the year—and so [the course] was jammed. It played so slow I only made nine holes. We had to be at the hotel for meetings at seven that night, so I decided to hunt for a couple of hours. I've got a tree stand about 45 minutes from here. I got in it about 3:45. I had a bow. Within 10 minutes a beautiful eight-point buck came right underneath me. I hit it right in the back. It ran off, and I waited a minute, then I found it, laying up against a tree. I dragged it out of the woods and put it in the truck. Blood all over the back of the truck. And I got to the hotel right on time. I'm a mess. People wonder what's happened to me. I'm like, 'It's been a great day. Touchdown passes this morning, golf this afternoon, an eight-point buck a couple of hours ago. How was your day?' "

Training, 1995

Funniest player, by far, I've ever covered. You haven't laughed till you've heard him do Billy Bob Thornton's dialogue from *Sling Blade* in precise dialect. Even better: Favre brought a remote-control fart machine onto the team bus before a big game against the Bears, and when the silent bus was stopped at a light, he hit the button that produced the sound of loud flatulence; coach Mike Holmgren shot angry glares at him.

Smartest player while playing the role of a rube I've ever covered. He'd nap and fart his way through a quarterback meeting, then ace the written test on that week's game plan. Maybe not the toughest player I've ever covered, but there's been no tougher quarterback than the man who played every Sunday for 16 straight years as a sitting duck for defensive linemen. And the most articulate player I've ever interviewed. (Well, he and Peyton Manning are tied for first there.) I'll never forget him sitting on a luggage cart in a stairwell at the Fairmont Hotel in New Orleans, two hours after winning Super Bowl XXXI, away from the adoring masses, spending 15 minutes explaining down to the minutest detail how Andre Rison got so open on the first touchdown of the game, and how he wished Steve Sabol of NFL Films would someday narrate what a wonderful play it was.

Celebrating, 2006

ON A FAVORITE PRANK: "Had to be when I pulled down [special teams coach] Frank Novak's pants after practice one day. Every day someone breaks us down after practice, finishes practice by saying something. So this day I say, 'Frank, break us down!' He loves that. So we're getting ready to say, 'one-two-three-TEAM!' and I pull Frank's pants down, right down to the ankles. He's just shocked. Everybody's whacking him on the rear end, and he's staring at me. Can't believe it."

But when people ask me what Favre is really like, I usually say, "Normal." He got a kick, as any kid would, at living the high life his first four or five years as a famous football player, but then he settled into the role of famous person half the year, guy-on-a-tractor-in-Mississippi the other half.

That's the guy I expect the retired Favre to be like. Doing battle with the dam-building beavers on his property. Edging the front lawn abutting the road in front of the house. Golfing. Maybe doing a little TV, but I doubt it. Just before wild-card weekend in January 2007, I called Favre's agent, Bus Cook, to see if Favre wanted to be an in-studio analyst for the NBC doubleheader that Saturday. I knew the answer, but I asked anyway. Cook laughed. "Brett was on his tractor all day today," he said, "and I'm sure that's where he'll be Saturday."

ON RETIREMENT: "You'll never find me. They'll do a *Where Are They Now?* segment on me on HBO, but they'll have to get Robert Stack, like on *Unsolved Mysteries*, to do it. I'll disappear."

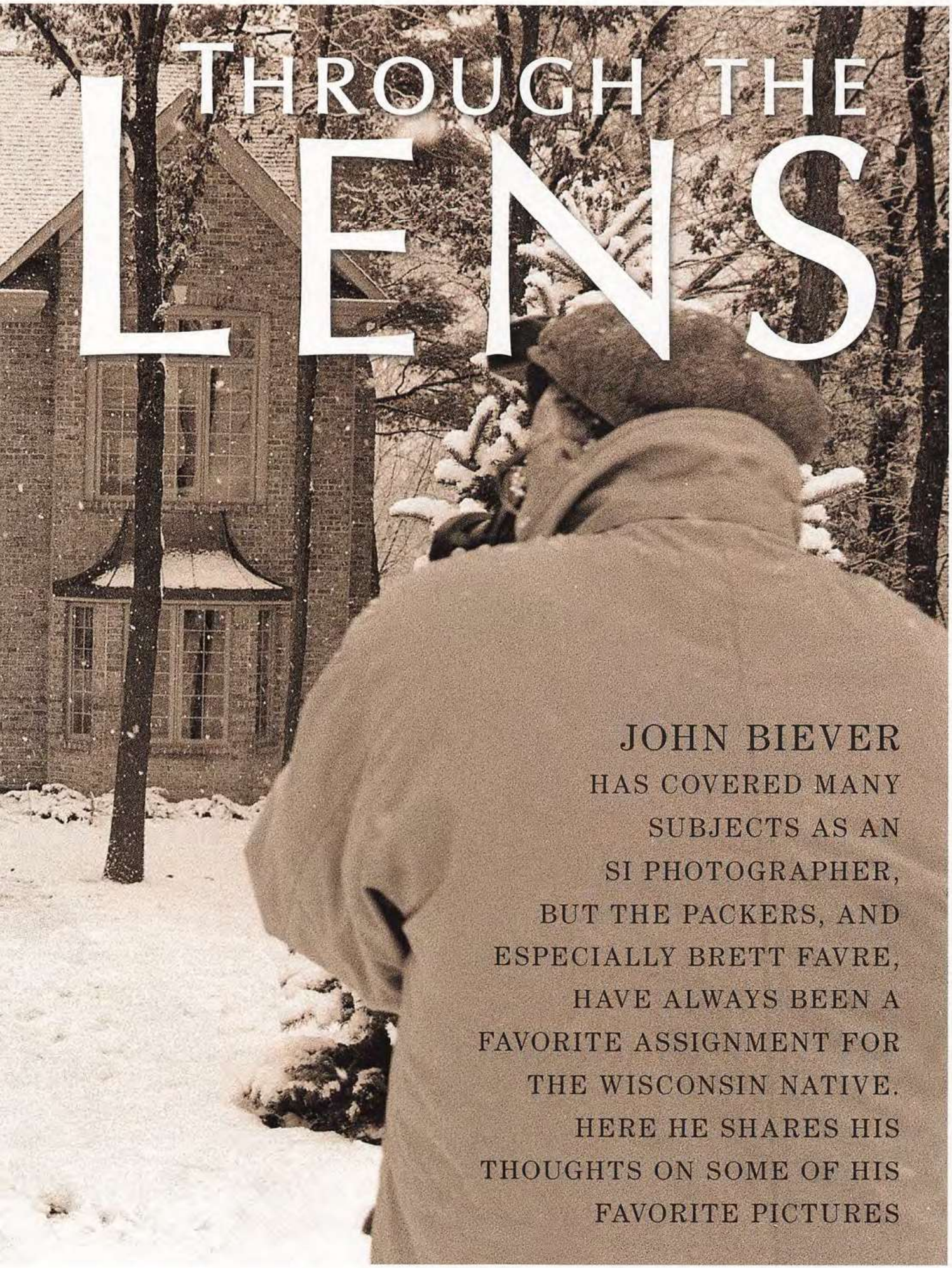
We may never find another one like him. □

FROM LEFT: JEFF HANISCH/US PRESSWIRE; JOHN W. MCDONOUGH; RICH FRISHMAN (2); MORRY GASH/AP

DEC. 6, 1996 ▸

MY FATHER, *Vernon (right), was with me when I was shooting Lambeau Field for an SI feature on the stadium. Favre noticed my father and asked him to shoot the Favres in front of their house for their Christmas card. I tagged along, and this was the result.*

THROUGH THE LENS



JOHN BIEVER HAS COVERED MANY SUBJECTS AS AN SI PHOTOGRAPHER, BUT THE PACKERS, AND ESPECIALLY BRETT FAVRE, HAVE ALWAYS BEEN A FAVORITE ASSIGNMENT FOR THE WISCONSIN NATIVE. HERE HE SHARES HIS THOUGHTS ON SOME OF HIS FAVORITE PICTURES

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FAVRE
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ALTHOUGH MY relationship with Brett Favre has mostly been at a professional distance, at the opposite end of a 600-millimeter lens, my father, Vernon, and my brother, James, have been close to him over the 16 years he has been in Green Bay.

My father has been the team's sideline photographer since 1941—he started when Curly Lambeau was coach. He and Favre are friends, and my father would go into the locker room before almost every game and sit down with Favre and chat for 10 to 15 minutes. They talked about everything except football. He photographed Favre's family for Christmas cards, and my dad and James also shot Brett and Deanna's wedding in 1996.

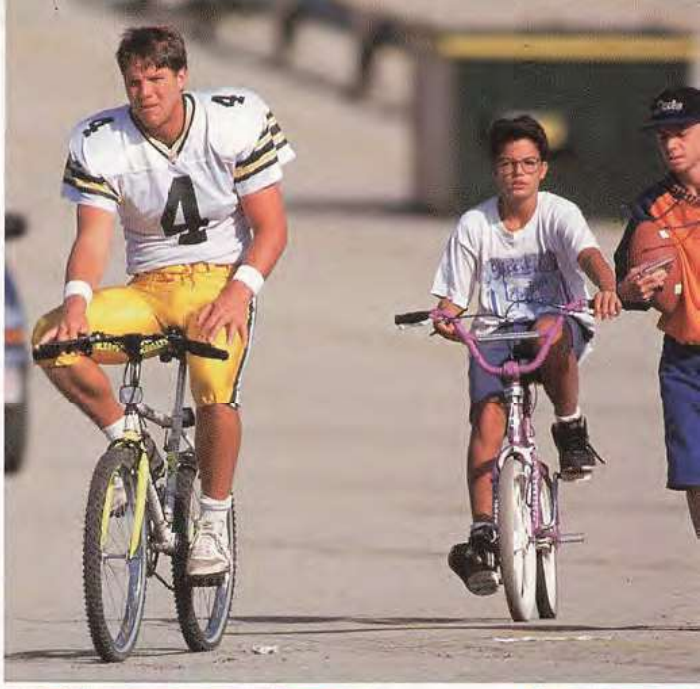
When I heard Favre was retiring, I thought of one incident that sums up the kind of person he is. About five years ago, while my father, then 80, was still shooting from the sideline (he now works from the press box), I was kneeling next to my dad during the game when Favre was chased out-of-bounds, coming precariously close to crashing into us. As he headed back to the huddle for the next play, he stopped and put his arm around my dad and said, "Vern, you've got to move a little quicker." My father got a big kick out of that. And Favre looked back and gave him a big smile. That was his nature. He gave everyone in the organization, from the general manager, to the mail clerk, to the team photographer, the same level of respect, and that was why he was so loved by everyone.

One thing we learned as photographers was to follow Favre off the field after touchdown passes. He wore his feelings on his sleeve. He reacted like a kid in a sandlot game. He was so full of joy, and he wasn't afraid to show it. The cover of this magazine is one such picture, taken after a score on Sept. 23, 2007.

These snapshots are some of my favorites, and I think they illustrate why Favre was beloved by Packers fans throughout his career. □

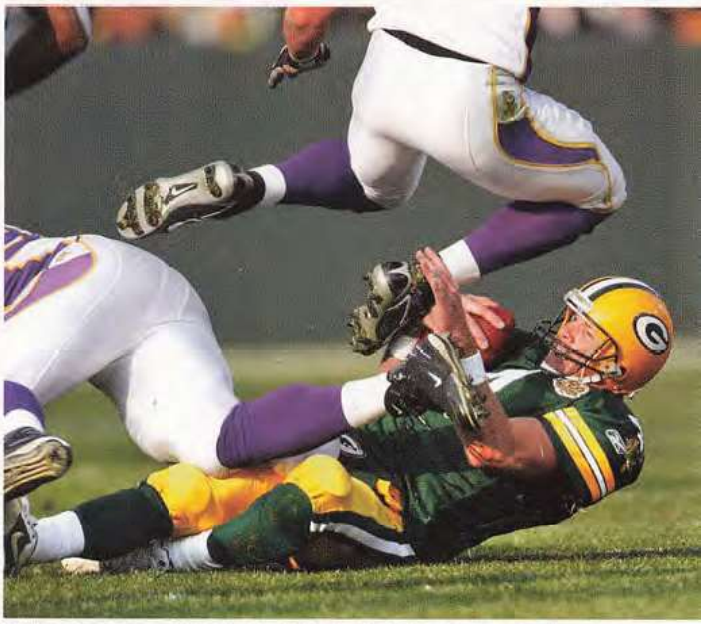
◂SEPT. 30, 2007

THIS PICTURE *of Favre hugging his wife, Deanna, after setting the NFL career record for touchdown passes summed up for me the joy and happiness of that marriage. She was sitting in the front row behind the Packers' bench, and he went right to her after the play.*



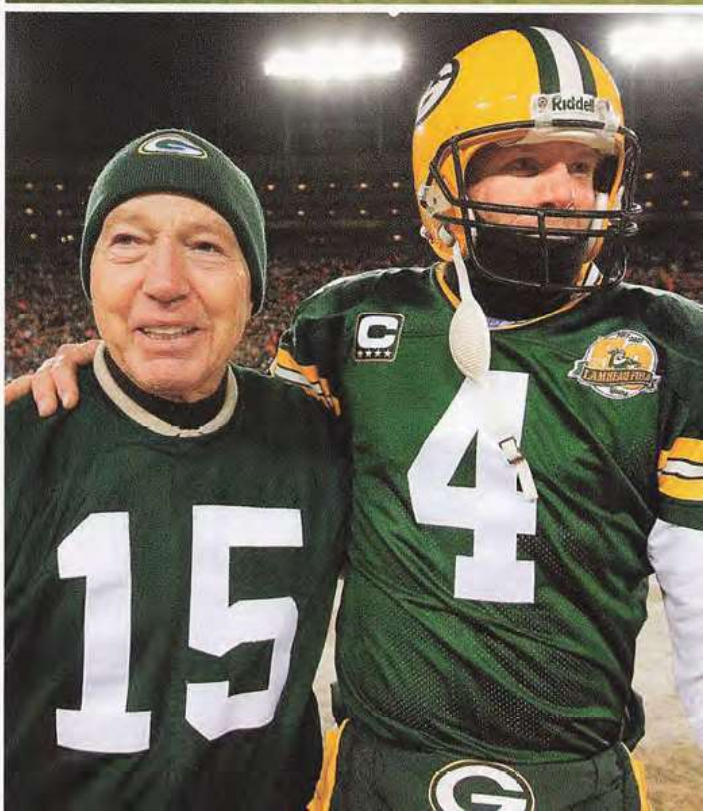
JULY 21, 1993 ▸

FAVRE FIT *right in with the crowd in Green Bay. He was a big kid. Eventually, he had to stop riding bikes in training camp because it got to be too much of a mob scene. I think this is one of the Packers' coolest traditions, so it's a shame that the star players now cause such a commotion that they can't take part.*



NOV. 11, 2007 ▸

THE SUN *was hitting his face perfectly, and even though he was getting tackled, I think it shows Favre's innate ability to avoid serious collisions and keep his amazing streak alive. I think this record, 253 consecutive starts for a quarterback, is the most amazing of all his records and probably why he is adored by Packers fans. The guy showed up for work every day—a Midwest work ethic.*



JAN. 20, 2008 ▸

THE PICTURE *of Bart Starr and Favre, together, coming off the field after the coin flip at the NFC Championship Game against the Giants is one I was trying to get for at least 10 years, and I finally got it—in Favre's last game. These were the quarterbacks for all four of the Packers' Super Bowl appearances. They are probably the two most loved and admired Packers players (sorry, Don Hutson and Ray Nitschke fans), and Starr was serving as Green Bay's honorary captain for that game. It was a picture I had to have.*

A BOY'S LIFE

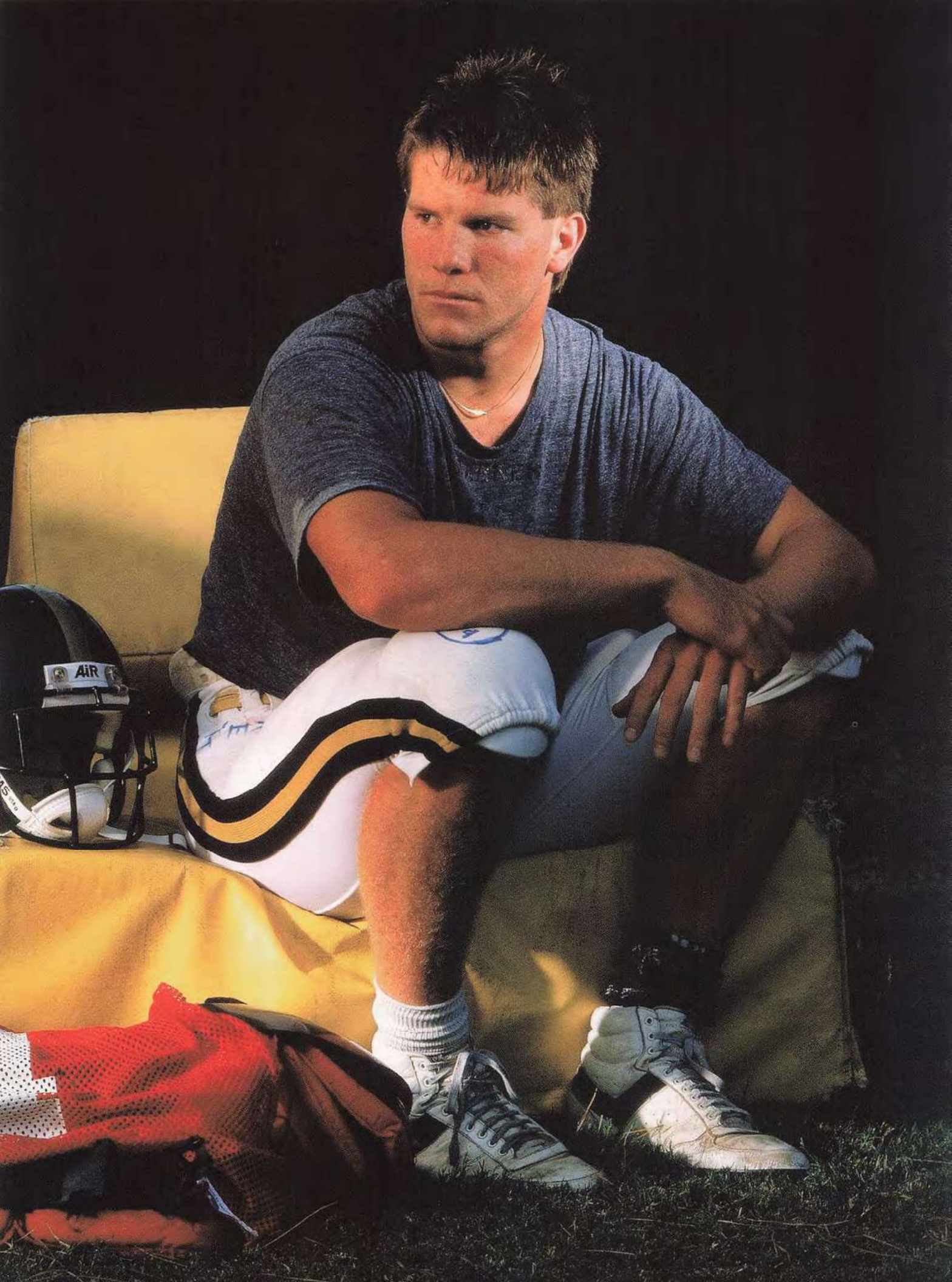
BEFORE HE WAS A RECORD-SETTING QUARTERBACK, BRETT FAVRE WAS THE NFL'S HOTTEST YOUNG PASSER. BACK THEN, HE

FAVRE

ESCAPED THE MOUNTING PRESSURES OF FAME BY RETREATING TO HIS FAMILY'S HOME IN KILN, WHERE EVERY DAY WAS THE FOURTH OF JULY AND HIS BIGGEST PROBLEM WAS, OF ALL THINGS, FINDING A CLEAN GOLF SHIRT

BY LEIGH MONTVILLE

Photograph by RONALD C. MODRA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From Sports Illustrated, August 23, 1993

BRETT FAVRE IS LOOKING FOR A CLEAN GOLF SHIRT. TWO CLEAN GOLF shirts, actually. He is flying to Pittsburgh in the morning, and in the afternoon he is playing golf at Oakmont Country Club, and the day after he is playing in one of those celebrity benefit things at some other Pittsburgh course. His agent has told him that playing at Oakmont is a big deal. The U.S. Open is played sometimes at Oakmont.

To move around a course that famous, a man should be dressed right. The agent is worried that Favre may not be dressed right. The agent knows Favre.

"I think about golf, and I think about wearing a T-shirt and cutoffs and sneakers," Favre says. "You know what I mean?"

A golf shirt. . . .

A golf shirt. . . .

He is looking through piles of clothes, looking through drawers, looking around and around his room. His room? It is a room from the pages of *Boys' Life*. Sports posters and pennants and memorabilia cover the walls and the ceiling, Charles Barkley dunking next to Joe Montana, who is passing a football, next to a program from the 1982 Sugar Bowl that was actually signed by a collegiate Dan Marino. A picture of Bear Bryant is placed directly above a picture of Jesus Christ. Priorities, perhaps.

"Is this all right?" Favre asks, pulling out a blue golf shirt from one of the piles.

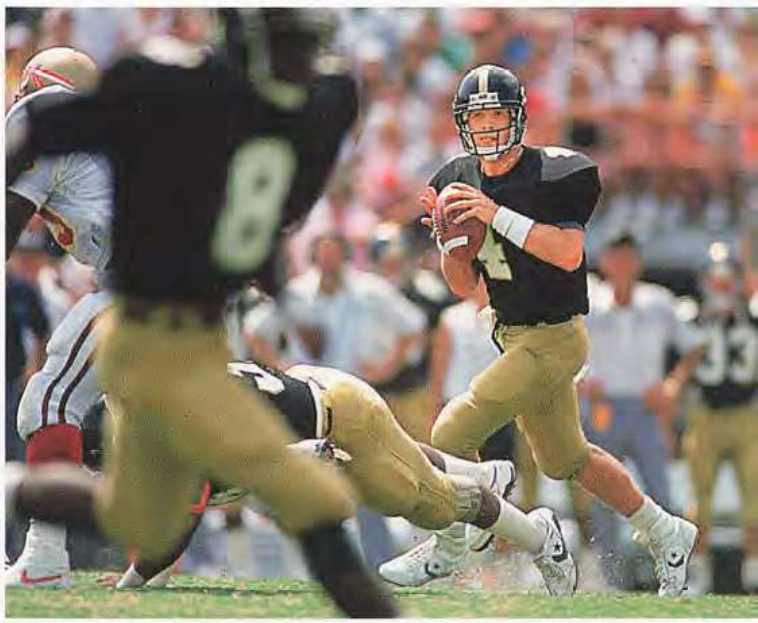
"Is it yours?" his mother, Bonita, asks.

Who's to say for sure? Who knows? The three Favre brothers live in this room, and the shirt could belong to any one of them. It also could belong to their father, Irvin (the Hammer); or maybe to their sister, Brandi, the reigning Miss Teen Mississippi; or maybe to their aunt Kay-Kay; or maybe to Bonita; or maybe to just about anyone in Hancock County. There's a kid named Clark who has been living in the house for a few weeks now, and Jeff, the youngest brother, back just today from his freshman year at Southern Mississippi, in Hattiesburg, has brought a friend to stay for a few days, and a kid named Mark has been around all day and . . . who knows? Laundry is a problem.

"Brett was wearing my shirt one day," Kay-Kay says. "I told him it was mine. He said it was his. I said, 'Well, that must be true, because you look awfully good in a T-shirt with shoulder pads. . . .' "

"Everybody just wears everybody else's clothes in this house," Bonita says. "It gets confusing. One time I just wrote names on everything, to keep down the fights. Well, Brett calls us from Green Bay one day. He got undressed in the locker room. Seems that the word DAD was written across the top of his underpants. . . ."

Blue. Brett decides the shirt must be his. Couldn't be anyone else's. He throws it into his traveling bag. Now he needs to find one more shirt for the trip. Why is the outside world so complicated?



THE HAMMER RULED THE HUDDLE AT HANCOCK NORTH CENTRAL, WHILE HIS SON LED THE WAY ON THE FIELD FOR SOUTHERN MISS.

The idea that anyone could come from this little place six miles from the Gulf of Mexico and wind up famous is borderline fantasy.

THE HOUSE is on Irvin Farve Road in Kiln, Miss., a dead-end dirt road that finishes at a still stretch of water called Rotten Bayou. On a hot day, of which there are many here, a visitor arrives in a small tornado of red dust. Almost 10 years ago the road was named after Brett's dad, which seemed logical because he was the local high school football and baseball coach, and no one but Favres and their relatives

FROM LEFT: RONALD C. MODRA (2); JOHN BIEVER

SEVENTH ON THE DEPTH CHART WHEN HE STARTED COLLEGE, FAVRE'S STOCK SOON ROSE ALONG WITH THE GOLDEN EAGLES'.

28

lived on the road anyway. The sign was misspelled, which is not so bad, because that is the way the name is pronounced. People can figure it out.

As for Kiln, the *n* is dropped by local speakers. The town of 2,000 residents is usually called the Kill. The question would be, "Where does the hottest young quarterback in the NFL live in the off-season?" The answer would be, "The Kill." People can figure it out.

"People say, 'You're the quarterback of the Green Bay Packers, and you live at home?' " Brett Favre says. "Well, I could be other places, but I can't think of one I'd rather be. Where else could I have so much fun?"

He is 23 years old and as uncomplicated as a Sunday afternoon. Natural. Where else could he fall out of his water bed every day and land in a family party? His grandmother Mee-Maw lives in that little trailer down the road and makes the best gumbo on the Gulf. (Mee-Maw's real name is Izella French, but Brett and his brothers began calling her Mee-Maw and their other grandmother Maw-Maw when they were little.) There is always someone around who will play a little golf or maybe go over to Biloxi or Gulfport and do a little gambling on one of those new paddleboat casinos. There is always someone around to have a beer, to start a barbecue. Where else is every day the Fourth of July?

"I remember the first long trip I made," Brett says. "Senior year of high school. The class trip. We went from here to New York and Boston. I went to a restaurant, a sandwich place in Boston. The guy said, 'What'll you have?' I told him I guess I'd have a shrimp po'boy. He just looked at me. I tried to explain what a po'boy was. I wound up with a submarine sandwich."

The wheels and gears of the Great American Celebrity Machine are only now starting to turn. There has not been time yet to turn him into a 6' 3", 220-pound plastic package, to make him accustomed to limousine living and large sums of money and every-day fame. Everything is still new. He basically has had one electric season in the NFL, in 1992, when he came off the bench for the Packers in their third game and never sat down again, rejuvenating the team, at one time passing for more than 200 yards in 11 straight games. The team missed the playoffs only on the final Sunday. He wound up in the Pro Bowl. He showed that he could throw the football. Then he came home.

"Reporters would ask me where I got my arm," he says. "I always thought it was from my father, but now I think I got it from my mother. She got mad at me last summer and threw a pastrami sandwich and hit me in the head. Hard. She really had something on that sandwich."

The good things that happened in Green Bay and in assorted other stadiums around the country still seem almost touched with magic. The idea that anyone could come from here—this little place six miles from the Gulf of Mexico, where an occasional alligator pokes its head from the bayou—and wind up famous is borderline fantasy. The Packers have virtually handed their team to Favre.

The wheels and gears of the Great American Celebrity Machine are only now starting to turn. Everything is still new.

QUALITY TIME WITH DEANNA AND BRITTANY WAS RARE AFTER

BRETT WAS DRAFTED BY THE FALCONS.

They dumped his competition, Don Majkowski, the hottest young quarterback of three years ago. They went heavy on the free-agent market this off-season, winning the big-money chase for defensive end Reggie White. They are making a run for a division title, making it with a kid quarterback.

This is a different situation for Favre. For the first time in his life he is not an underdog. "I've always had to struggle for what I've got," he says. "I was never recruited for college. Coming from down here, nobody knows who you are. Three days before the signing date I was going to either Pearl River Junior College or Delta State. Southern Miss took me as a defensive back. When I went there as a freshman, I worked out both ways at first. I was the seventh quarterback on the depth chart."

Seventh on the depth chart? He was third by the time his freshman season started. He was playing by the second half

FROM LEFT: JIMMY CRIBB/WIREIMAGE.COM; RONALD C. MODRA; PERRY MCINTYRE/WIREIMAGE.COM

WOLF DIDN'T GIVE UP ON FAVRE EVEN THOUGH HE THREW JUST FOUR PASSES WHILE RIDING ATLANTA'S BENCH IN '91.

of the second game, throwing two touchdown passes to beat Tulane. "Southern Miss was a place where everyone had been rejected by the big schools," he says. "We were the Island of Misfits. We thrived on that. We'd play Alabama, Auburn, and there'd be stories in the papers about how we'd been rejected by them. We'd come out and win the game, and guys would be yelling on the field, 'What's wrong with us now?' It was a great way to play."

As his senior year approached, Favre was known as a fearless kid who could throw the ball. The Southern Miss offense had been redesigned for his talents. He had completed 79 passes for 1,264 yards and 15 touchdowns during his junior season. The pro scouts were interested. He was ready for big things. Then he flipped his Nissan Maxima and almost killed himself during the summer before that senior year.

The accident happened in the Kill, less than a mile from his house. Returning from a July afternoon of sun and, sure, fun at Ship Island, he says he was blinded by the lights of another car. He swerved and hit gravel, and when he tried to pull the car back onto the road, it began to flip. His brother Scott was following in another car and later reported that one flip was so high, "you could have driven a dump truck underneath the car." Scott broke the front window to pull Brett from the wreckage. Brett wound up in the hospital with a concussion, lacerations, a cracked vertebra and, it turned out, complications.

FAVRE TOOK ADVANTAGE OF HIS FIRST START IN GREEN BAY, LEADING THE PACKERS TO A 17-3 WIN OVER THE STEELERS.

This is a different situation for Favre. For the first time in his life he is not an underdog. "I've always had to struggle for what I've got," he says.

"I was out of the hospital, and I thought I was O.K.," Brett says. "I wasn't eating much, though, and when I did, I was throwing up. I kept having these abdominal pains, and they started to get worse. I went back to the hospital, and they found that a lot of my intestines had died."

Thirty inches of intestines was removed. His recovery had to begin all over again. He reported to Southern Miss in mid-August but was still having trouble eating. Back he went to Kiln, where Mee-Maw's cooking finally got him going. Five weeks after the surgery he was at Southern Miss again, in uniform, 30 pounds underweight, leading the Golden Eagles to a 27–24 upset over Alabama.

"You can call it a miracle or a legend or whatever you want to," Alabama coach Gene Stallings told reporters later. "I just know that on that day, Brett Favre was larger than life."

The Eagles finished the 1990 season at 8–4. Favre ended up in the Senior Bowl and the East-West Shrine Game. At the Shrine game he more than caught the attention of Ron Wolf, then a scout for the New York Jets. After the accident a lot of scouts had dropped Favre in their thinking. Wolf still liked the way he threw the ball and also liked the way he took charge, the way he had that gift of making everyone else in a huddle listen and respond. How many leaders does a scout see?

Alas, the Jets had already lost their No. 1 draft pick by signing Syracuse wide receiver Rob Moore in the supplementary draft. Their first choice was in the second round, 34th overall. The Atlanta Falcons picked Favre with the 33rd pick and gave him a three-year contract worth $1.2 million. It wasn't until the next year, after Wolf had become the Packers' general manager, that he could finally make his move. On Feb. 10, 1992, Wolf traded the Pack's first pick to Atlanta, for which Favre had thrown only four passes all season playing third string. Wolf was told he was crazy.

" 'Have your lost your mind?' was what most people said," Wolf says. "I just really liked him. He has that unexplainable something about him."

The 1992 season turned out better than Favre or even Wolf could have expected. When Majkowski went down with sprained ligaments in his left ankle, the prognosis was that he would miss two weeks, maybe four. Favre came into the lineup, won two games and simply rolled. Natural. He finished with 302 completions for 3,227 yards and 18 TDs. He was sixth in the league in completion

JOHN IACONO

What Can We Say?

The simple fact is, we can't thank you enough.

You've done so much for this team—and for this game—that you've made it hard for us to imagine either one without you. After all, we're fans first. And as fans, it's been a joy and a privilege to watch you play over the years.

But as partners, it's been even more fulfilling.

Through your efforts—and the efforts of the entire Green Bay Packers® organization—our **Touchdowns for Charity** program has raised **over $250,000** for the **Hunger Task Force** to help needy families throughout Wisconsin.

So thank you, Mr. Favre.

Thank you for your passion. For your commitment. And for sharing your extraordinary talent with us.

Enjoy your retirement. You've certainly earned it.

Sincerely,
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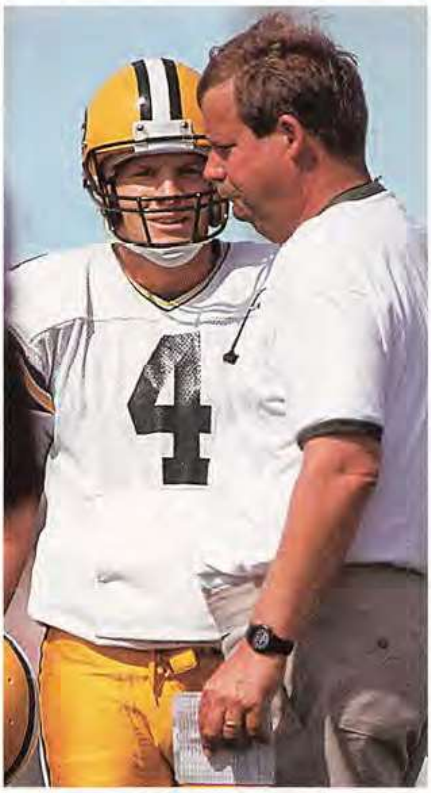
percentage, third in interception rate.

He also showed durability and resourcefulness. In the first half of his seventh start his left shoulder was separated in a hit delivered by White, then with the Philadelphia Eagles. It was a brutal play. Favre had thrown his pass and could see the collision coming. He turned his body to absorb it. White grabbed his hand and yanked him back the other way to make him vulnerable. The two men landed together. Favre's shoulder was the point of impact. It was a move designed to do what it did—to hurt him, hopefully to put him out of the game—not to stop the pass. He stayed in the game, shot up with a painkiller at halftime, but could not lift his arm as high as his shoulder and could not hand off to the left. The Eagles and the rest of the teams on the Packers' schedule saw his difficulty and worked on it. The shoulder hurt for the rest of the season, but he still played.

"Now Reggie's with us," Favre says. "I talked with him at minicamp. He said he thought for sure he had put me out. I told him I thought he had too. Then he put his arm around me. He told me not to worry, that this year we were on the same side. I liked that."

"SPORTS ILLUSTRATED," Favre says, packing for the trip to Pittsburgh. "In my junior year a writer came down to Southern Miss to do an article for SPORTS ILLUSTRATED. He said he wasn't sure the article would be in, but if we beat Florida State in our opener, he was pretty sure it would make it. We go out. We pull the upset. All I'm thinking about the last few minutes on the field is, God, I'm going to be in SPORTS ILLUSTRATED."



AFTER FAVRE'S ELECTRIC '92 SEASON, MIKE HOLMGREN AND THE PACKERS RETOOLED THE TEAM AROUND THEIR NEW STAR.

Wolf liked the way Favre threw the ball and the way he had that gift of making everyone else in a huddle respond.

The article never appeared—Southern Miss went on a four-game losing streak after the upset—but so be it. SPORTS ILLUSTRATED. He will be in there now. It will mention the new house he has added to the colony on Irvin Farve Road. It is a family house. A party house with a swimming pool. It has changing rooms, a big-screen TV, a pool table and video games, a room with a Jacuzzi, a full kitchen to prepare party foods and a deck large enough to hold as many people as might show up at any one time.

"We've already had parties there," Favre says. "Nothing planned. They just happen. A couple of weeks ago we started on Thursday, and by Saturday there were over 100 people on the deck."

This night's plans seem to be taking shape. Favre is going to New Orleans, where he will take a hotel room so he can make his 6:30 a.m. flight to Pittsburgh. Clark, the friend, is going along for the ride to New Orleans and to spend the night partying. Mark, the other friend, is also going. Jeff, the younger brother, is not going. Back from college, he plans to look around the area for some friends and some action. Scott, the older brother, is also not going, because he is in Hattiesburg taking a real estate course.

Bonita is going down to Mallini's Point Lounge in Pass Christian with Mee-Maw and Mee-Maw's boyfriend. Once he gets cleaned up after a late dinner, Irvin will join them. Mallini's was once owned by Mee-Maw's late husband, Bennie French, who was a local rogue of sorts, a man who managed boxers and had a speakeasy and ran whiskey off the Gulf Coast for Al Capone. Bonita and Irvin once worked at the bar, and Brett and Scott rode their Big Wheels around the pool tables when they were young. Kay-Kay is staying home because she has to go to work early in the morning. Brandi, Miss Teen Mississippi, is also staying home. She is 16 and says she lacks dates because Brett and her other brothers say they will seriously injure any boy who comes to the door.

Perhaps Brett's own experience has educated him in this regard. He has a four-year-old daughter, Brittany, with Deanna Tynes, whom Brett has been dating since ninth grade. [They were married in 1996.] Brittany stays at the house every day while her mother works. Deanna is getting Brittany ready to go home. It is not an awkward situation. In fact, it is quite pleasant. Everyone is making a fuss over Brittany.

"Why would I want to be anywhere else?" Brett says from the middle of the activity. "Why?" □

JOHN BIEVER

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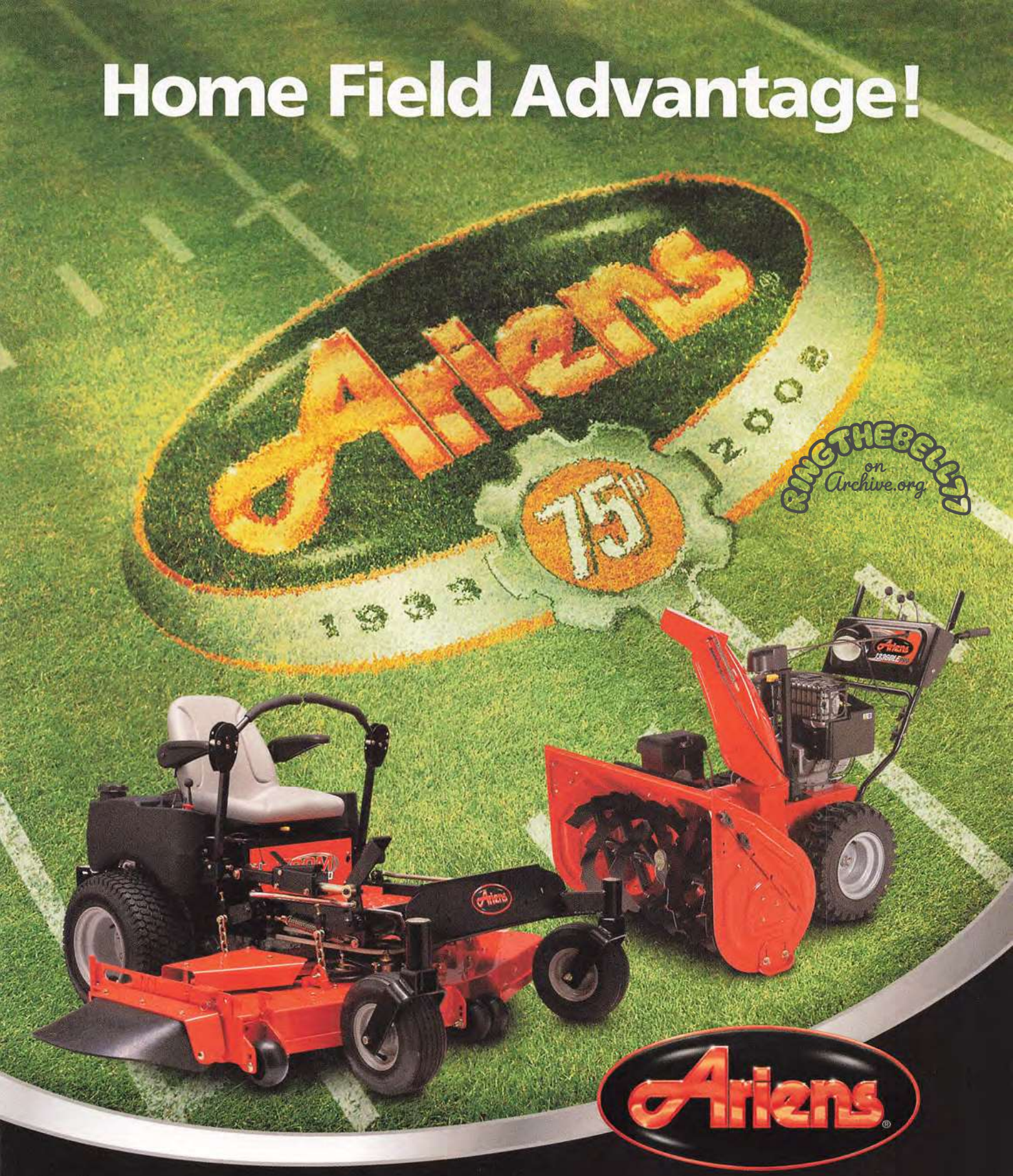

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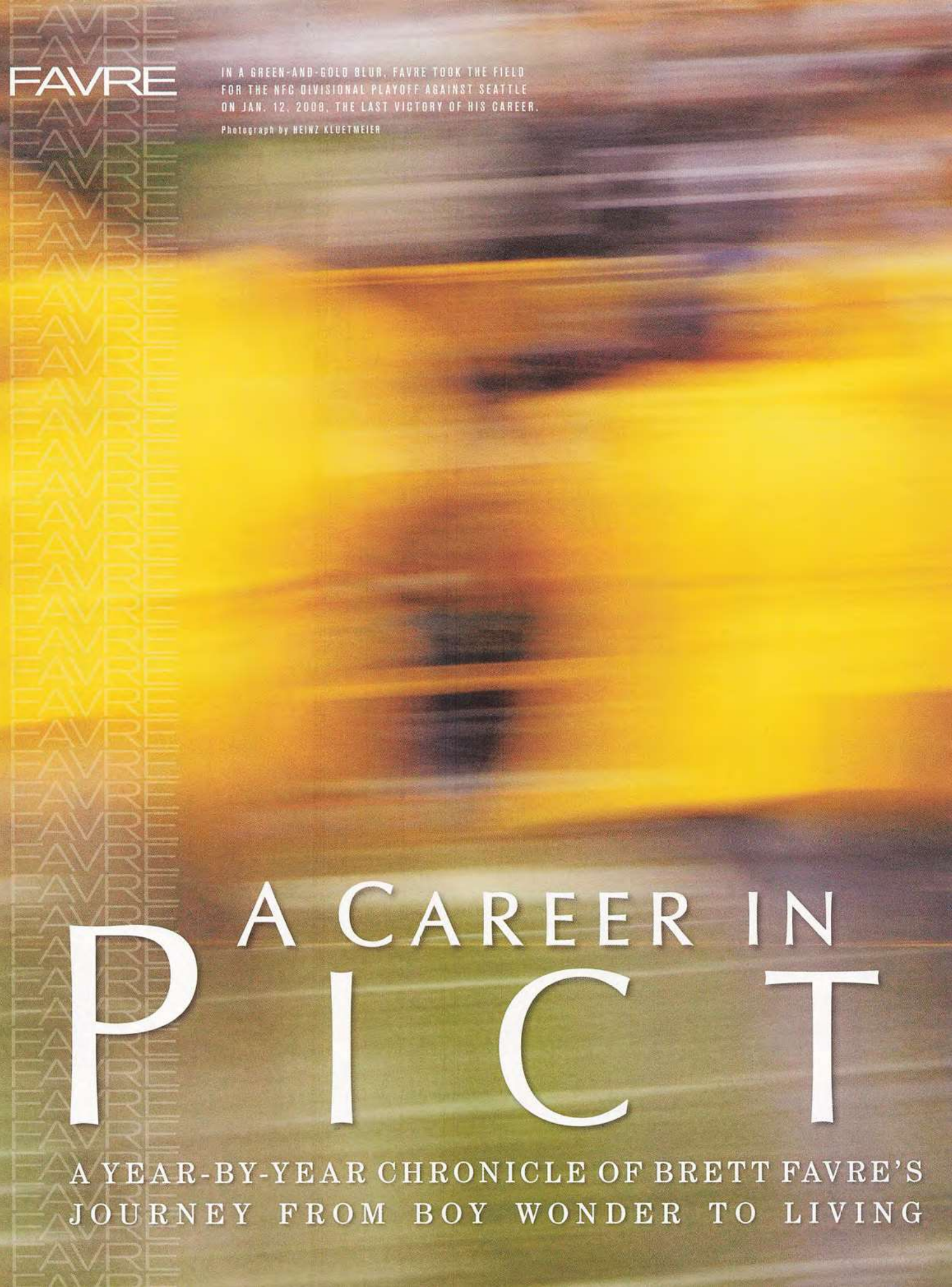
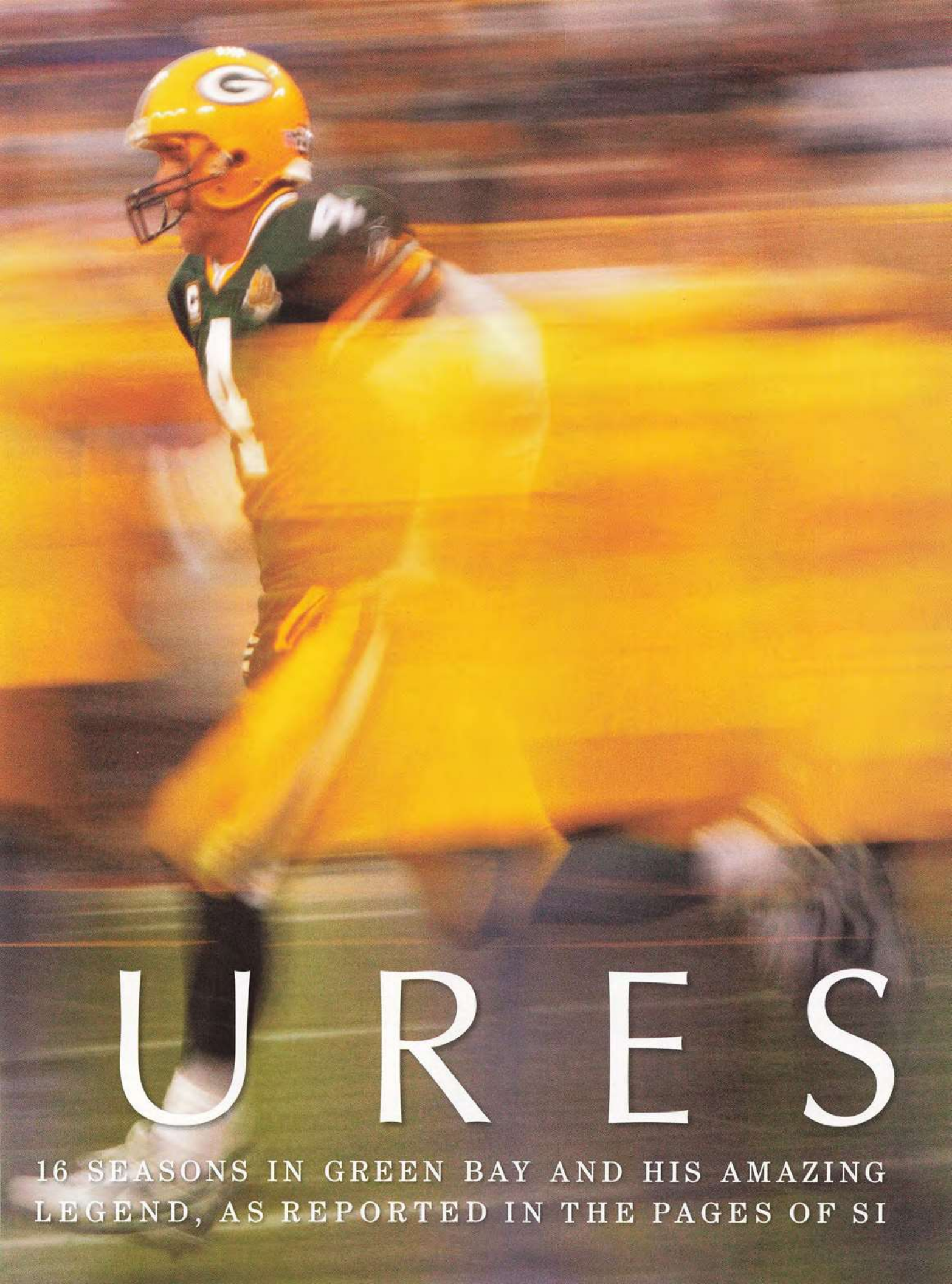


IN A GREEN-AND-GOLD BLUR, FAVRE TOOK THE FIELD FOR THE NFC DIVISIONAL PLAYOFF AGAINST SEATTLE ON JAN. 12, 2008, THE LAST VICTORY OF HIS CAREER.

Photograph by HEINZ KLUETMEIER

A CAREER IN PICT

A YEAR-BY-YEAR CHRONICLE OF BRETT FAVRE'S JOURNEY FROM BOY WONDER TO LIVING



U R E S

16 SEASONS IN GREEN BAY AND HIS AMAZING LEGEND, AS REPORTED IN THE PAGES OF SI

AN EXCITABLE BOY

'92

HIS JOY FOR THE GAME WAS CONTAGIOUS AND HIS FLAIR FOR THE DRAMATIC WAS EVIDENT WHEN BRETT FAVRE FINALLY GOT HIS HANDS ON THE CONTROLS IN GREEN BAY

From Sports Illustrated, October 5, 1992

THERE'S NO BETTER PLACE FOR A FOOTBALL LEGEND TO BEGIN than at Lambeau Field on an autumn afternoon. And there's no better time than now. The premier quarterbacks of this era, the Montanas and the Moons, are going gracefully into their golden years, and the NFL needs some new talent with fresh charisma to put on the season-ticket brochures. Quarterbacks sell, baby. That's why the Pittsburgh Steelers–Green Bay Packers game on Sept. 27 was a match made for NFL Properties. On one side of Lambeau Field stood 6' 3", 228-pound Neil O'Donnell, 26, trying to resuscitate the dormant Steelers empire. On the other was baby-faced 6' 2", 220-pound Brett Favre, trying to become the next Bart Starr.

For the second time in eight days Favre (rhymes with *carve*) stole the show, leading the Packers to victory and evening their record at 2–2. On Sept. 20, trailing the Cincinnati Bengals 23–17, Green Bay had the ball on its eight, with 1:07 to play and no timeouts. Favre drove the Packers the 92 yards for the winning score, throwing a picture-perfect 35-yard touchdown pass to wideout Kitrick Taylor with 13 seconds left.

Against Pittsburgh, Favre lofted another perfect pass, this time a 76-yard bomb to wideout Sterling Sharpe for a TD and a 10–3 halftime lead. Early in the fourth quarter, with Green Bay at the Steelers' eight, the Packers called a play in which wideout Robert Brooks would fake a slant-in and then fade toward the right corner of the end zone. "Remember," coach Mike Holmgren told Favre on the sideline, "you've really got to like it to throw it. It has to be there."

Later Holmgren would say, "I had to tell him that because Brett has a wild hair. Last week, after our win, I congratulated him and then told him he'd made mistakes on 25 plays. I told him if we had lost, the quarterback would have been the reason." Suitably warned, Favre took the snap, pump-faked to Brooks on the slant-in and then rainbowed the pass to Brooks in the end zone. Packers win 17–3.

This season a handful of teams have shoved inexperienced quarterbacks to the forefront, giving them a shot at becoming the big guns of the future. Favre is the rawest talent and maybe the most promising.

Reining in Favre's enthusiasm may be Holmgren's biggest task. After the winning drive against the Bengals, Favre ran off the field jumping and screaming as if he'd won the lottery. The game, however, was only tied, at 23; he was supposed to hold for the extra point. With the play clock running down, kicker Chris Jacke grabbed Favre and shouted, "Focus! We've got to kick the extra point!"

"I've got a lot to learn," says Favre. —*Peter King*

JOHN IACONO (RIGHT, TOP); TOM LYNN

THE 22-YEAR-OLD SHOWED ALL HIS GIFTS AGAINST THE STEELERS–SCRAMBLING, IMPROVISING AND THROWING DEEP TO NOTCH HIS SECOND NFL WIN.

Photograph by JOHN IACONO

HIGHLIGHTS

- Replaced Don Majkowski in the first quarter of Week 3 and led the Packers to a 24–23 comeback victory, the first of 25 he would orchestrate.
- Made his first start, against the Steelers on Sept. 27, commencing a streak of 253 starts, the most by an NFL QB.
- Completed 302 passes, tied for first in the NFL with Troy Aikman of the Cowboys.
- Went 8–5 as a starter and helped the Packers to their second-best record in 20 years (9–7).

'93

"SOMETHING BETTER"

THAT'S WHAT FAVRE WAS ALWAYS LOOKING FOR—AND WHAT HE BECAME—DURING A SEASON CAPPED BY A THRILLING COME-FROM-BEHIND WILD-CARD VICTORY OVER THE LIONS

From Sports Illustrated, January 17, 1994

FOR BRETT FAVRE IT WAS DÉJÀ VU FOR, OH, MAYBE THE 26th time this season. Feeling pressure, he scrambled to his left near midfield in the Silverdome during the NFC wild-card game on Jan. 8, 1994, and heaved a bomb toward the right corner of the distant end zone. A minute remained in the game, the Detroit Lions were ahead 24–21, the season was on the line, and the time was right for a Favresque faux pas.

Favre had thrown a league-high 24 interceptions during the regular season and had added a 25th in the third quarter that was returned 15 yards for a touchdown by Lions cornerback Melvin Jenkins, and, hey, why not toss one more log on his crackling bonfire of screwups? Indeed, while rolling left Favre had started to throw safely underneath the coverage to tight end Ed West, who was crossing from right to left, but then that most volatile of objects—Favre's brain—kicked in. "I told myself, There's gotta be something better," he said with a grin after the game. "That's my problem. Sometimes there's not something better."

This time there was. It came in the form of streaking All-Pro wideout Sterling Sharpe, who blew past Lions cornerback Kevin Scott on the right sideline as though Scott were picking flowers. Scott, who quite possibly felt that no human could throw a ball from where Favre was to where Sharpe would be, should be forgiven any miscalculation. Favre's across-the-field rocket traveled at least 60 yards.

The pass prevented the game from being nothing more than a reenactment of the previous week's Silverdome battle between these two teams. Detroit won that one, and the NFC Central Division crown, 30–20, largely by coaxing Favre into tossing four interceptions. This time the Lions were sabotaged by their own quarterback, Erik Kramer, who played the Favresque role by throwing two passes that were picked off in the end zone. The first was intercepted by Packers cornerback Terrell Buckley, and it snuffed a first-quarter drive. The second came with the Lions leading 17–14 in the third quarter and on the brink of putting the game away. Rookie safety George Teague stepped in front of a short pass intended for Detroit tight end Ty Hallock and set sail for the longest touchdown—101 yards—in postseason history.

Fifteen minutes later, with the ball soaring toward Sharpe as he stood all alone in the end zone, one quarterback, at least, was about to be redeemed. Favre was so happy about his touchdown throw that he almost passed out. "I lost my helmet, my ear pads," he said. "I started hyperventilating. I was looking for someone to kiss." He even empathized with Kramer. "I've been there before," said Favre. But for this day, at least, déjà vu took a hike.

—Rick Telander

HIGHLIGHTS

- Started all 16 games and led the 9–7 Packers to the playoffs for the first time since 1982.
- Had an NFC-best 318 completions and passed for 3,303 yards, second in the NFC.
- Set a single-game team record with 36 completions, on Dec. 5, breaking the previous mark of 35 set by Lynn Dickey in 1980.
- Limped to the huddle and threw the game-winning TD in a 13–10 win over Tampa Bay one play after sustaining a deep thigh bruise.

TOM LYNN (2)

IN TRAINING CAMP BEFORE HIS SECOND SEASON IN GREEN BAY THE YOUNG FAVRE HAD PACKERS FANS ANTICIPATING GREAT THINGS TO COME.

Photograph by JOHN BIEVER

PACKERS

Riddell
4

READY TO ARRIVE '94

NEARING THE END OF HIS FOURTH NFL SEASON, FAVRE WAS PROVING—TO HIS COACH AND HIS LEGIONS OF DOUBTERS—THAT HE WAS NO LONGER GREEN IN GREEN BAY

From Sports Illustrated, December 19, 1994

THE NUMBER SAT THERE ALL OFF-SEASON—IN THE PIT OF Brett Favre's stomach, like a day-old doughnut. Everywhere he went and in every Packers story he read, there it was. Twenty-four.

Favre threw an NFL-high 24 interceptions during the 1993 regular season. Everybody threw that number back at him before the start of the next season, wondering whether the 25-year-old third-year starter was going to be too mistake-prone to be a winning NFL quarterback. How was the wild-eyed, wild-armed Favre ever going to fit in under coach Mike Holmgren, the reigning master of the precision passing game?

"There's no question it bothered me," Favre said of the doubt about his ability. "I couldn't understand why a young quarterback was catching so much blame. Young quarterbacks make lots of mistakes. But this season I was determined to play well. I was going to do whatever it took."

In 6° windchill at Lambeau Field on Dec. 11, 1994, Favre proved that he has become one of the top 10 quarterbacks in the league. His relatively safe 19-of-31 game led the Pack to its best offensive show in more than a decade. Green Bay beat Chicago 40–3, and the Packers' 516 net yards were their most in a game since '83.

In '93 Favre threw for 3,303 yards, with 19 touchdown passes and those 24 interceptions. This year he has thrown for 3,270 yards, with 28 TD passes and 12 interceptions. Holmgren attributes the improvement to playing time. "In the past we'd give good young quarterbacks five years to mature before we handed a team to them. Now, with free agency, we have to find out if a guy can play before his contract is up. And so quarterbacks play early. I said all along that this would be Brett's takeoff year. We talked in the off-season about game management, and we're seeing better results."

Favre hasn't arrived. He still makes kid mistakes. He still opens games with an arm full of adrenaline: Against Chicago he overthrew two piddling screens in the first quarter. "He's not going to be the most accurate quarterback I ever coached," says Holmgren, "but I've coached Joe Montana and Steve Young. Brett's making good decisions, and he's shown he'll be accurate." He's surely becoming a smarter player.

On Dec. 4 Favre had his best game of the year in a loss at Detroit, throwing for 366 yards. In the locker room afterward Holmgren told him, "You played a great game, but it wasn't the perfect game."

"That's asking a lot," Favre said.

"It's what we're shooting for. You've got to know that," Holmgren said.

Favre won't be perfect. But he has proved he can carry a good team. And who wouldn't give the moon today for a 25-year-old quarterback with guts and a golden arm, scars and all? —P.K.

DAVID E. KLUTHO (RIGHT, TOP); JAMES V. BIEVER/WIREIMAGE.COM

FAVRE, WEARING A 1937 JERSEY TO HONOR THE NFL'S 75TH ANNIVERSARY, THREW ONLY 14 INTERCEPTIONS IN '94 WHILE LEADING THE PACK TO NINE WINS.

Photograph by ROD TRINGALI JR.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Finished second in the league with a 90.7 passer rating, behind Steve Young, whose 49ers won the Super Bowl that season.
- Threw for 3,882 yards, becoming the second QB in team history to have more than 3,000 yards in three seasons.
- Set a Green Bay record for most completions (363).
- Scored the winning TD with 14 seconds left to lead the Packers to a 21–17 win over the Falcons on Dec. 18.

'95

MVP AT WORK

EXECUTING THE GAME PLAN TO NEAR PERFECTION ON THE FIELD AND CLOWNING AROUND OFF IT, THE FUN-LOVING FAVRE LED THE PACK TO THE NFC CHAMPIONSHIP GAME

From Sports Illustrated, January 15, 1996

THESE PACKERS MAY NOT EVOKE MEMORIES OF VINCE Lombardi's roughneck teams that dominated the 1960s, but they do have some old-style machismo in their gait. That's instilled by the leadership of 34-year-old defensive end Reggie White, a spiritual man nearing the end of an arduous quest for an NFL championship, and 26-year-old quarterback Brett Favre, a Mississippi country boy whose raunchy wit and unflappable grit have spiced up the Pack and its West Coast offense.

Despite playing with a torn left hamstring against the reigning Super Bowl–champion San Francisco 49ers in this NFC divisional playoff game, White soared over many chop blocks while applying relentless pressure on 49ers quarterback Steve Young. Favre, who this season succeeded Young as the league MVP, came through with what he acknowledged was the best game of his five-year NFL career, completing 21 of 28 passes en route to a 299-yard, two-touchdown, no-interception day as the Packers beat the heavily favored 49ers in every phase of the game to win 27–17.

Though it ended with a blocked field goal, Green Bay's first possession of the game set the tone. The Packers used up seven minutes to march 48 yards, and Favre dispelled one giant misconception along the way. While watching the Packers' quarterback warm up before the game, some 49ers noticed that his passes were fluttering and took it as a sign that he was nervous. Yeah, and Dick Clark got stage fright before *American Bandstand* tapings. "Why be nervous?" Favre asked later. "If we lose, everyone expects it. If we win, we're kings. We came to play. By the middle of the game, I was checking out cheerleaders while I was in the huddle."

Favre completed 15 of his first 16 passes. In executing the game plan to near perfection, he picked apart the middle of the 49ers' zone, connecting with backup tight end Keith Jackson four times for 101 yards and a touchdown, including one outrageous 28-yard completion: Late in the third quarter Favre slipped while rolling out of the pocket and still zinged a perfect pass as he was regaining his balance.

Known as much for his bathroom humor as for his passing prowess, Favre possesses a small-town, no-frills genuineness and a keen prankster's bent. On the Wednesday before the game Favre's main target, Robert Brooks, was sitting in a toilet stall when Favre heaved a cup of ice water over the top, dousing the receiver. Later that day Favre raided the locker of backup quarterback Jim McMahon and placed hot wax in McMahon's underwear.

But after the game the man who had the last chuckle was Packers coach Mike Holmgren. Holmgren smiled broadly. "I don't make guarantees," he said, "but if we play like this, I like our chances."

Why not?

—Michael Silver

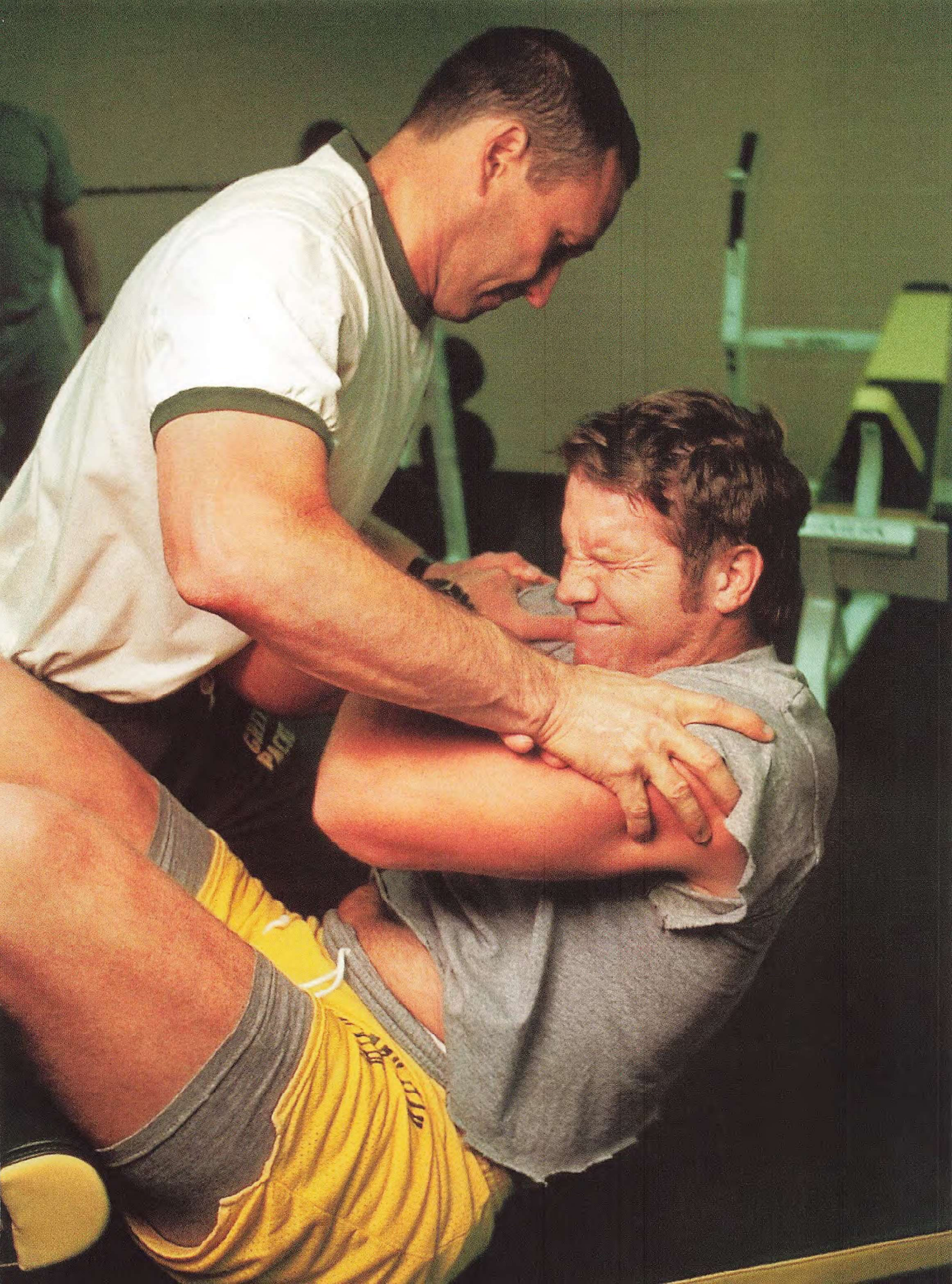
HIGHLIGHTS

- Led the NFL with a career-best 4,413 passing yards and was named league MVP.
- Coughed up blood on the sideline during a timeout, then threw a touchdown pass on the next play to help Green Bay clinch the NFC Central with a win over the Steelers.
- Despite a severely sprained left ankle, threw for 336 yards and five TDs in a 35–28 victory over the Bears.
- Had a careerlong 40-yard run in a win over Jacksonville.

BRAD MANGIN (LEFT, TOP); RICH FRISHMAN

AS STRENGTH COACH KENT JOHNSTON KNEW, FAVRE WAS BEST AT CRUNCH TIME, WITH 25 FOURTH-QUARTER COMEBACKS IN HIS CAREER.

Photograph by RICH FRISHMAN



'96

THE SUPREME MOMENT

WEARIED BY PERSONAL TRAGEDY AND WORN DOWN BY THE FLU, THE LOCAL BOY WAS SIMPLY SUPER IN THE BIGGEST GAME OF HIS LIFE AND HELPED BRING THE TITLE BACK TO TITLETOWN

From Sports Illustrated, February 3, 1997

AFTER A WEEK OF MEDIA COVERAGE DOMINATED BY SPECULATION about the future of New England Patriots coach Bill Parcells, Super Bowl XXXI was decided by the men who played it. MVP Desmond Howard's 99-yard kickoff return was the defining moment in the Packers' 35–21 victory, which gave the storied Green Bay franchise its first NFL title in 29 years, but Brett Favre was a big part of the story too.

Favre's Super Bowl week was a sideshow second only to Parcells's. First, the quarterback had his life's history dissected by a wave of reporters who visited his hometown of Kiln, Miss. Then a story broke that Favre, who spent more than six weeks in a rehab facility the previous spring for addiction to a painkiller, would no longer be tested by the NFL for alcohol as part of his aftercare program. With Bourbon Street beckoning, this was big news—until the report turned out to be false.

The irony was that the flu-stricken Favre could barely handle chicken soup; he spent Thursday night in his hotel room, shivering with a 101° temperature. "I was worried," he admitted later. "I'd waited my whole life to play in this game, and now I wasn't going to be healthy. But the night before the game, I slept great, and I felt pretty good when I woke up."

Favre was clearheaded enough to burn New England for two touchdowns after making adjustments at the line of scrimmage. On the first he detected the Patriots, with both safeties up at the line, were about to come with an all-out blitz. So Favre changed the play from a safe quickout to tight end Mark Chmura to a deep post route by Andre Rison. The wideout was open by about five yards when he caught Favre's pass at the 20 and duckwalked into the end zone.

After New England had taken a 14–10 lead, Favre put Green Bay ahead for good with another astute call. Less than one minute into the second quarter, he saw the Patriots' defensive backs line up in single coverage against a three-wideout set, with strong safety Lawyer Milloy on Antonio Freeman, the slot receiver. Sensing another blitz, Favre changed the blocking scheme and then found Freeman down the right sideline. Freeman easily outran the Patriots defenders for an 81-yard score.

During the Packers' raucous victory party, Favre sought temporary refuge in a nearby stairwell. There he reflected on his tumultuous off-season, which included the death of his best friend, Mark Haverty, in a car accident in which Brett's brother Scott was driving.

"Through everything," Brett said, "I really believed I'd be here today." He laughed and continued, "Right here in this stairwell, talking about being world champions. Trouble never seems to be far away, and the future won't be all rosy, but they can't take this away from me." —M.S.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Led the Packers to their first Super Bowl since the 1967 season.
- Topped the NFL in TD passes (a career-high 39) and was named league MVP by the Associated Press for the second straight year.
- With the temperature at 3°, completed 19 of 29 passes to defeat Carolina in the NFC Championship Game.
- Named NFC Offensive Player of the Month after throwing 16 TDs in September en route to a 4–1 start.

DAVID N. BERKWITZ (LEFT, TOP); V.J. LOVERO

FAVRE, WHO COMPLETED 14 OF 27 PASSES FOR 246 YARDS AND TWO TDs IN SUPER BOWL XXXI, ALSO OUTRAN THE PATS' TODD COLLINS FOR A SCORE.

Photograph by JOHN BIEVER

59

HEINZ KLUETMEIER (RIGHT, TOP); V.J. LOVERO

THE GOOD COP

'97

OFFSETTING COACH MIKE HOLMGREN'S BAD COP ROUTINE, A PLAYFUL FAVRE LED THE PACK TO SUPER BOWL XXXII WHILE ONCE AGAIN SHOWING HE'S AN ABSOLUTE GAS

From Sports Illustrated, January 19, 1998

THEY ARE THE YIN AND YANG OF CHEESEHEAD NATION, ONE spewing smoke from his ears, the other playfully kicking up dust. While coach Mike Holmgren does his best to stomp the fun out of Green Bay's drive for a second straight championship, Brett Favre is setting off stink bombs.

Holmgren may be one of the NFL's biggest control freaks, but he's smart enough to know who rules the football universe. In a driving rainstorm, Holmgren put Green Bay's NFC championship hopes in Favre's hands, and Favre flawlessly delivered a 23–10 victory over the 49ers at 3Com Park.

Neither nerves nor blitzes nor the elements have been able to slow Favre's march to San Diego and Super Bowl XXXII. After tearing up San Francisco with 222 passing yards in a game the Pack was never in danger of losing, Favre conceded that the prospect of facing a team coached by his close friend and former mentor, Steve Mariucci, had made him uncharacteristically jumpy. "I was real nervous last night," he said. "I said more prayers before this game than before any game I remember. No formal prayers, but just praying for, well, wisdom, I guess. We were playing a great team with a great defense, and I just prayed that I'd play smart and make good decisions."

Some players call Holmgren Mussolini; Favre is more like Federico Fellini. During the Pack's 21–7 divisional playoff victory over Tampa Bay, Bucs defensive tackle Warren Sapp got in Favre's face after one hard rush and said, "I'm going to be after your ass all day." Favre patted the 288-pound Sapp on the gut and said, "With that tummy, I don't think you're going to make it." The day before the Niners game, as he concluded a production meeting with Fox announcers, Favre set off a stink bomb. "John Madden had some sort of adverse reaction," Favre said. "He was bracing himself against the wall, looking ill."

With two weeks to prepare for the Broncos in the Super Bowl, Favre and Holmgren undoubtedly will be more polarized than ever in their approaches. Maybe their good cop/bad cop routine is by design. Says Packers left tackle Ross Verba, "Asses were tight this week, but Brett Favre is the leader of the Pack when it comes down to it. He keeps us loose."

While waiting in the Packers' locker room after the victory, Favre, 28 going on 12, dispensed some advice to Mariucci's 11-year-old son, Adam. "Smell this," Favre urged, offering a tiny vial of yellow liquid. Adam complied and recoiled; the liquid had the scent of rotten eggs. "Here's what you do," Favre said, handing the boy the vial. "Take this to school tomorrow. And at recess, put one drop somewhere and see what people do. One drop'll kill 'em."

It's a game plan Holmgren would hate, but one to which the coach could probably relate. One dose of Favre might be all Denver can take. —M.S.

AFTER LEADING GREEN BAY TO THE NFC TITLE, FAVRE REACHED HIS SECOND STRAIGHT AND, AS IT WOULD TURN OUT, LAST SUPER BOWL.

Photograph by AL TIELEMANS

HIGHLIGHTS

- Shared the AP's NFL MVP award with Detroit running back Barry Sanders, becoming the league's only three-time winner.
- Led the Packers to a 13–3 record and their third straight NFC Central crown.
- Completed four TDs in a 45–17 victory over the Cowboys, his first win against Dallas in eight games.
- Threw 27 TD passes (and no interceptions) in the red zone in 19 regular-season and postseason games.

4

VINTAGE GUNSLINGER

'98

YES, HE OFTEN SHOT FROM THE HIP, BUT THE PACKERS' QB HAD MORE HITS THAN MISSES AND WAS RIGHT ON TARGET WHEN A GAME—OR THE SEASON—WAS ON THE LINE

From SPORTS ILLUSTRATED, October 5, 1998

WITH 11 MINUTES TO PLAY AND HIS TEAM CLINGING TO a 30–23 lead over the Panthers at Ericsson Stadium, 28-year-old Brett Favre stepped under center, feeling as if he were 58. It was third-and-one at the Carolina 33. It was his 73rd snap on Sept. 27 when the field thermometer hit 104°. What hurt most? "My feet," Favre said later. "Felt like they were burning off."

The play called for Favre to roll right and throw to one of the three receivers who had flooded that side of the field. At practice earlier in the week, Green Bay coach Mike Holmgren had reminded Favre not to pull up, because when he had stopped while running the same play two weeks earlier, he had been leveled by the Bucs' defense.

What did Favre do this time? He stopped, of course. None of his three options were open, but out of the corner of his eye he saw wideout Derrick Mayes, whose responsibility was to occupy a cover guy on the left side of the field. Mayes was creeping toward the middle. "Brett knows he's not supposed to throw back across the field," center Frank Winters says, "but he's looking over, and I think, Oh, s---, here we go again. All of a sudden the ball's whizzing by my face."

The ball went right to Mayes, who juked linebacker Mike Barrow and was gone, 33 yards for what proved to be the winning touchdown in Green Bay's 37–30 victory.

For Favre, it was a signature game, and the numbers—27 completions in 45 attempts, 388 yards, five touchdowns, three interceptions, two sacks, eight knockdowns—tell only part of the story. Twice he acted impetuously and threw interceptions that resulted in touchdowns for the Panthers, but both times he wasted little time in driving his team for a go-ahead score.

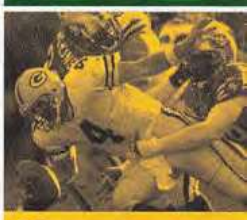
"How fun was this?" Favre said after the game. "I mean, where else would you rather be than playing this game on a day like today, with great players chasing you and fighting back like that? Just awesome."

Favre couldn't stop talking about one play. Trailing 10–6 early in the second quarter, partly because of an interception that Favre threw on his first play from scrimmage, the Packers faced a third-and-five from the Carolina 21. In the huddle Favre told his teammates, "Don't jump. I'm going to try to draw them offside. And wideouts, finish your routes." Sure enough, Barrow took the bait, Winters snapped the ball, flags flew, free play. Favre dropped five steps, avoided the rush from the outside and threw awkwardly off his back foot. The ball spiraled 32 yards, just beyond the fingertips of cornerback Eric Davis and into Mayes's hands in the back right corner of the end zone. —P.K.

JOHN BIEVER (RIGHT, TOP); GRANT HALVERSON/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

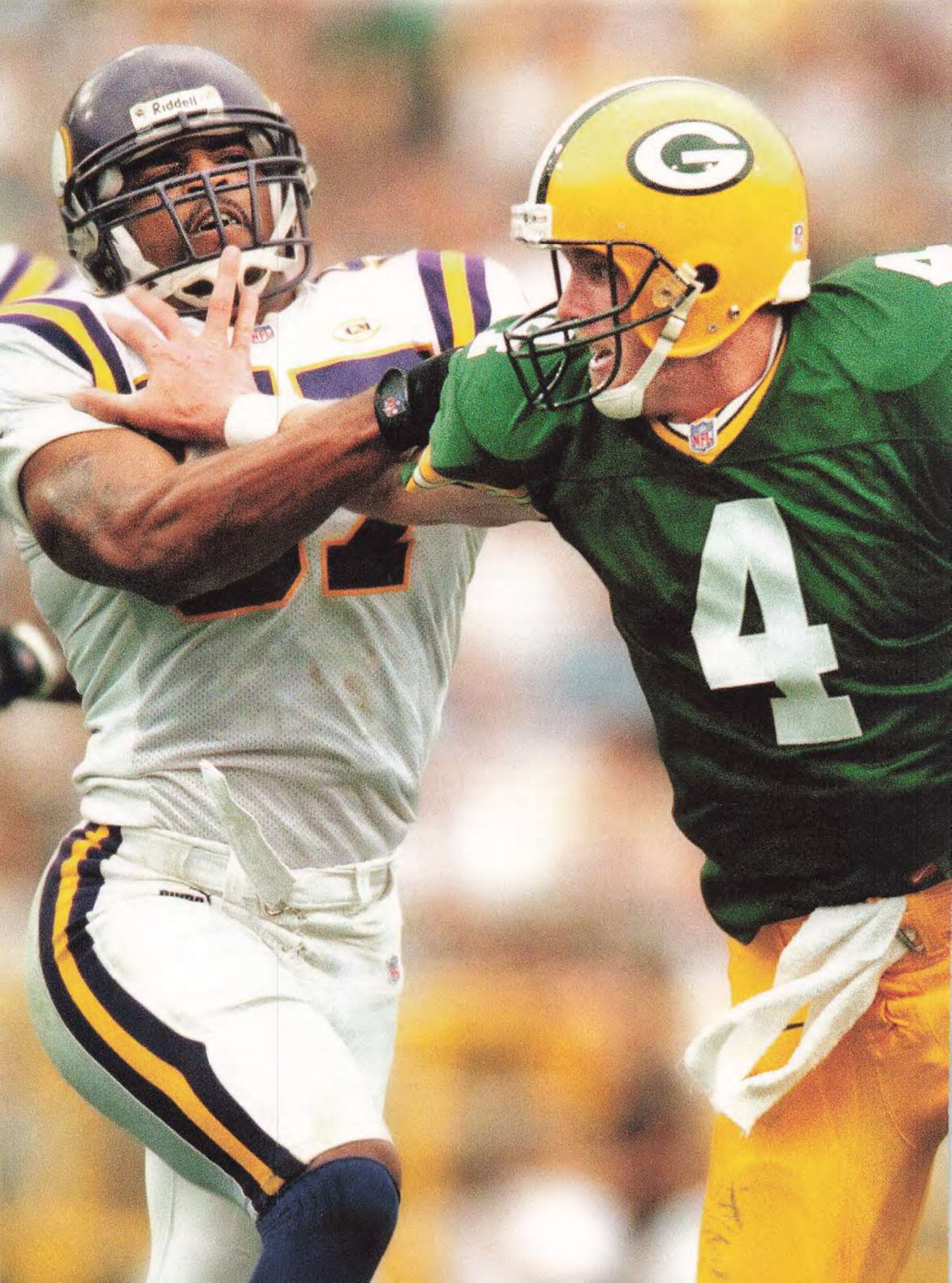
MASTER OF THE ELEMENTS AGAINST TENNESSEE, FAVRE WRAPPED UP THE SEASON WITH THREE STRAIGHT WINS TO CLINCH A WILD-CARD SPOT.

Photograph by JOHN BIEVER



HIGHLIGHTS

- Led the NFL in passing yards (4,212), completions (347) and completion percentage (62.976).
- Against the 49ers on Nov. 1, overtook Bart Starr (24,718 yards) to become the Packers' alltime passing leader.
- Threw for 253 yards, three TDs and no interceptions in the snow during a 30–22 win over Tennessee.
- Tossed 31 TD passes (along with 23 interceptions) to lead Green Bay to an 11–5 record.


Riddell
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BETTER WITH AGE '99

ON THE CUSP OF HIS 30TH BIRTHDAY, FAVRE'S LAST-MINUTE MIRACLES HAD MORE TO DO WITH HIS (NOW) METICULOUS PREPARATION THAN THEY DID WITH SHEER GUTS AND LUCK

From Sports Illustrated, October 11, 1999

THE LAST PASS THAT BRETT FAVRE THREW IN HIS 20s MADE grown men cry. Minutes after the Packers' madcap quarterback hit wideout Corey Bradford with a 23-yard scoring dart on fourth-and-one with 12 seconds left to beat the Vikings on Sept. 26, 1999, he met coach Ray Rhodes near the door of Green Bay's locker room. The two wept. "You gotta stop doing this to me!" Rhodes said, hugging Favre after his quarterback's second last-minute, game-winning touchdown pass at Lambeau Field in 15 days. "You're gonna give me a heart attack."

The winning play—a reckless one, some would say, because Favre could have dumped the ball off near the sideline, gotten the first down and gathered his exhausted wits—was called with a hand signal at the line. Afterward Minnesota players wondered why Favre would risk it all instead of going for the first down and living to fight a last battle. But why turn a magician into a mechanic?

Favre turns 30 on Oct. 10, and few signs point to the only three-time MVP in the history of the league being any less of a player in his 30s. "Thirty's just a number," Favre says. "If anything, I move better because I've paid attention to my conditioning. My arm feels as good as ever. I'm much smarter. My first three or four years, I got by slinging it. Now my study of the game is showing. Those two-minute drills aren't luck."

The drive, and particularly the final play, against the Vikings was of the caliber that made John Elway a legend. "I was tired," Favre recalls, "as tired as I'd ever been on the field. I started getting sick before the game with this flu, I was dehydrated, and we were losing. We didn't get the first down the play before, the clock's running, and we're all just walking to the line. Everybody's asking for the play, and I say, 'Just line up!' So the wideouts line up, three on one side, one on the other. My mouth is so dry, I'm spitting cotton balls. I give everybody the signal"—Favre puts his index and middle finger together on each hand and wiggles them—"which means go or quick stop, depending on the coverage. If the receivers get bumped, they go. If they're given room, they stop. It looks like we've got bump-and-run.

"I don't remember saying a word, but the ball's in my hands," he continues. "Later [center] Frankie [Winters] told me that [Vikings tackle] John Randle called the snap, trying to confuse us. Then I'm thinking, I don't know if my guys know the situation—if I throw short and they don't know to get out-of-bounds, the game's over. The coverage is bump-and-run. I look to the right, at [wideout] Bill Schroeder, pump right to keep the safety there, then turn back. Sure enough, Corey was free. I threw it as hard as I could. Corey got under it. Amazing. We don't really call a play; Minnesota calls our snap count; we win." —P.K.

HEINZ KLUETMEIER (RIGHT, TOP); MIKE ROEMER/AP

HIGHLIGHTS

- Completed two last-minute comebacks in September (a 28–24 win over the Raiders and a 23–20 win over the Vikings).
- Named NFC Player of the Month for September after throwing for 925 yards and five touchdowns in three games.
- Threw for an NFL-high 1,347 yards in the fourth quarter for the season.
- Led Packers to an 8–8 record despite playing most of the year with a sprained thumb.

FAVRE'S EFFORT AGAINST THE VIKINGS LEFT HIM BRUISED AND DEHYDRATED, BUT IN THE END IT WAS THE OPPOSING TEAM WHO SUFFERED THE LOSS.

Photograph by HEINZ KLUETMEIER

'00

FULL OF SURPRISES

WITH THE PACKERS STRUGGLING TO REACH THE PLAYOFFS UNDER THEIR THIRD COACH IN THREE SEASONS, THEIR LEADER KEPT THE TEAM LOOSE AND HIMSELF FOCUSED

From Sports Illustrated, December 18, 2000

BEFORE A MEETING OF THE PACKERS' OFFENSE A COUPLE OF weeks ago, Brett Favre hid a remote-control device under the chair of coordinator Tom Rossley. When Rossley began to speak, Favre hit the remote button, and the staccato sound of flatulence turned all eyes in the room toward the coach. Rossley did what all men do when confronted in that situation: He swore he didn't do it. "It's the video machine!" he said, as the place broke up.

At 31 Favre is still full of boyish mischief that keeps his teammates loose, but he's tightened up his personal life. As he chipped golf balls inside the Packers' practice facility on a December Saturday in 2000, he talked about handling his addictions to alcohol and the painkiller Vicodin, the latter of which nearly derailed the three-time league MVP's career in 1996.

"I've been dry for two years, and I don't miss it a bit," he said of drinking. The Vicodin? Favre said he picked up a prescription for his wife, Deanna, the day before, after she'd had dental work. "The pharmacist handed it to me, and I looked at it: Vicodin-ES. I got chills. That was my favorite. I was supposed to take one of those a day for pain. I was up to 15. I just sat there thinking how times have changed.

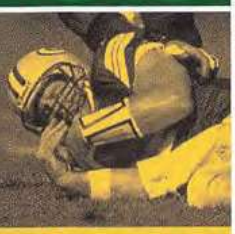
"A few weeks ago in Tampa, I hurt my foot. It hurt so bad I thought it was broken. The doctor gave me Darvocet, which can be addictive. Never took it. Got by on Motrin."

Trying to keep the Pack's playoff hopes alive against the Lions on Dec. 10, Favre was suffering in another way. On a bone-chilling day in Green Bay he was uncharacteristically inaccurate, completing 15 passes in 36 attempts for 208 yards, but that didn't keep him from sticking to his routine. With the Packers nursing a 12–3 lead early in the fourth quarter, Favre got on the phone to Rossley, who was up in the coaches' booth. "Hey, Tom," Favre said, "I'm struggling with my accuracy, but let's not stop chuckin' it."

Detroit scored to pull to 12–10, and on Green Bay's ensuing possession Favre faced third-and-eight from the Lions' 49. He made a perfect throw deep down the right sideline to wideout Bill Schroeder for a 45-yard gain. Two plays later Favre hit running back Ahman Green for a three-yard score, and the Packers won 26–13 to even their record at 7–7.

"Brett did not have a particularly good day, except with the game on the line," Green Bay general manager Ron Wolf said afterward. "That's part of the problem. He's spoiled us so much because of how good he really is."

—P.K.



HIGHLIGHTS

- Twice set up kicker Ryan Longwell to hit last-minute, game-winning field goals (in September against the Eagles and in October against the 49ers).
- Led the Packers to four straight wins to close out the season.
- Attempted an NFC-high 580 passes.
- Passed for 290 yards and three TDs at the Metrodome on Dec. 17 to upset the Vikings and keep them from clinching home field advantage throughout the playoffs.

FAVRE & CO. CAME UP SHORT, 20–16, IN THEIR OPENER AGAINST THE JETS, COACH MIKE SHERMAN'S DEBUT, AND IN THEIR PLAYOFF RUN.

Photograph by JOHN BIEVER

JOHN BIEVER (LEFT, TOP); RICHARD MACKSON

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BIG-GAME HUNTER

PLAYING WITH NO FEAR AND A DEADLY ACCURATE RIGHT ARM, FAVRE HAD THE BEST GAME OF HIS LIFE AND BAGGED A BIG ONE: THE SUPER BOWL–CHAMPION RAVENS

From Sports Illustrated, October 22, 2001

ONE DAY BEFORE THE PACKERS' SHOWDOWN WITH THE SUPER Bowl–champion Ravens, quarterback Brett Favre drove 30 miles in a steady rain to a hunting preserve in northeast Wisconsin. He climbed a tree and sat in a stand with his bow and arrows, waiting for a buck. The rain never let up, and Favre sat for four hours without firing an arrow. The following morning he was still so eager to shoot that before he left for Lambeau Field, he fired three arrows at a target in his backyard. "All three were dead center in the bull's-eye," Favre said after the game. "I didn't think anything of it at the time, but I guess it was a good omen."

Favre, 32, has won three league MVPs and one Super Bowl. He has passed for more than 4,000 yards three times and thrown at least 30 touchdowns five times. Playing the Ravens, going against what he called the best defense he's ever faced, he had arguably the best game of his life.

In Green Bay's stunning 31–23 win, Favre had the most efficient passing day by a Ravens' opponent since 1997 (27 completions in 34 attempts, for 79%), accounting for 337 yards and three touchdowns with no interceptions. "I'm not in fear of anyone," Favre said from his home four hours after the game, while an outdoors show played on the TV. "But last week I watched six Baltimore games on tape. Good offenses, too, like Oakland's and Denver's. I saw that so many teams have chances but never capitalize. When [offensive coordinator] Tom Rossley talked to our offense about the game last week, he told us we could have 400 yards if we executed right. I'm looking around the room at our young guys, and I can see them thinking, Sure. Who's he trying to kid?"

Late in the third quarter, with Green Bay up 17–10, Favre sent Donald Driver and two other receivers down the left sideline, while Antonio Freeman did a curl on the right. He stared a hole in Freeman, trying to make the safety cheat toward that side, all the while yearning to throw deep to Driver.

"From the time I started playing quarterback in the fifth grade," Favre said, "I was always taught not to throw a pass when the safety is there to help. But I thought that I could get this ball in to Donald. Before he turned for it, I threw the ball as hard as I could, and the safety charged. The ball got to Donald at the perfect time." The 37-yard completion helped set up Green Bay's third touchdown.

Afterward the Favres—Brett, wife Deanna and daughters Brittany and Breleigh—joined a crowd of players and their families at Brett's Green Bay steak house for dinner. A fan asked the quarterback if the Ravens had talked much trash. "Not at all," Favre said. "They were the classiest guys we've played. I talked with a bunch of them after the game, and they said, 'Great job. Stay healthy. Hope we meet in the Super Bowl.' " —P.K.

JOHN BIEVER (RIGHT, TOP); AL TIELEMANS

THE FAVRE-LED VICTORY OVER BALTIMORE HELPED PROPEL THE PACKERS TO A 12-4 RECORD AND A SPOT IN THE DIVISIONAL ROUND OF THE PLAYOFFS.

Photograph by HEINZ KLUETMEIER

HIGHLIGHTS

- Completed 22 of 29 passes and two TDs to rally the Packers to a 25–15 wild-card victory against the 49ers.
- Passed for more than 3,000 yards for the 10th straight season, breaking Dan Marino's record, set in 1992.
- Ran for the game-winning, six-yard TD with 1:30 remaining in a 28–21 victory against the Jaguars.
- Moved Green Bay into first place in the NFC Central with two passing TDs in a 20–12 victory over Chicago.

'02

STREAKING ALONG

FAVRE'S ENTERTAINING BLEND OF RECKLESSNESS AND BRILLIANCE WAS ON DISPLAY ALL SEASON AS THE VETERAN QUARTERBACK LED GREEN BAY TO SEVEN STRAIGHT WINS

From Sports Illustrated, November 18, 2002

BRETT FAVRE LOCKED IN ON HIS TARGET AND BARRELED into the fray. Man, it's been a long time since I've done this, he thought as he charged across the wet Lambeau Field grass on Sunday, Nov. 10, his fragile left knee be damned. Wideout Terry Glenn had just turned a short Favre pass into an apparent 47-yard touchdown, and the quarterback was intent on reaching Glenn before the receiver could make his first Lambeau Leap. As Favre ran frantically to the end zone, he looked like the victim of one of his own classic pranks, a man with hot sauce in his jock. When, finally, he slammed Glenn to the ground and rolled underneath him, Favre screamed, "That's why we brought your ass in here!"

Never mind that after a replay review Glenn was ruled to have been down at the one-yard line or that Favre sheepishly admitted to Green Bay coach Mike Sherman after the game, "That was the only time I felt any knee pain all day." Favre's brilliance has always included a measure of recklessness, and this was a 33-year-old living legend at his finest—decisive, unpretentious and willing to embrace the emotion of the moment.

"When something like that happens—and we had a lot of moments like that today—you feel so powerful as a quarterback," Favre said after the Packers had spanked the Lions 40–14 for their seventh consecutive victory, the franchise's longest winning streak since 1963. "I don't know where we're going to end up, but it's impressive what we've been able to do so far, and it sure has been a lot of fun."

When Favre has this much fun, football fans get goose bumps—and the rest of the NFL feels the chill. In his 12th season Favre shows no sign of decline. His garish 2002 numbers include a 65.7 completion percentage, a 17-to-4 touchdown-to-interception differential and a 101.7 passer rating. "I don't think Brett would admit to this," Sherman says, "but he's at a level he hasn't been at before."

Like Joe Montana, the man he passed early in the game to move into sixth place on the NFL's career-passing-yardage list, Favre is a homespun hero who uses levity to lead. "I'm 100 percent convinced that all people, at any job, are at their best when they're relaxed," he says.

Long after the game, as he sat in a room in Lambeau flipping a half-full water bottle into the air, Favre remained giddy about Glenn's big play, which set up Najeh Davenport's one-yard touchdown run. "I've always been confident," Favre said, "but this is the most confident I've ever been, and the reason is the way the guys around me are playing. [Wideout] Donald [Driver] made a great block, and Glenn made the guy covering him look silly."

Take that last point as gospel. Favre happens to be an expert on the subject.

—M.S.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Surpassed the 40,000-yard milestone in 166 games, becoming the third-fastest QB to reach the mark.
- Selected to play in the Pro Bowl for the seventh time. Received the most fan votes for the second straight year, getting nearly 183,000 more than the second-place player, Priest Holmes.
- Down 19–6 in the third quarter, Favre led 67-, 54- and 85-yard TD drives to help Green Bay beat the Vikings 26–22 on Dec. 8.

DAMIAN STROHMEYER (LEFT, TOP); JOHN BIEVER

THE FUN—AND THE PACKERS' REMARKABLE REGULAR-SEASON RUN—WAS ENDED WITH A 27-7 WILD-CARD PLAYOFF LOSS TO THE FALCONS ON JAN. 4, 2003.

Photograph by JOHN BIEVER

4

'03

GRIEF AND GREATNESS

THE NIGHT AFTER HIS FATHER'S SUDDEN DEATH, FAVRE HONORED HIS MEMORY—AND THE SPIRIT OF THE GAME BOTH MEN LOVED—WITH ONE OF HIS FINEST PERFORMANCES

From Sports Illustrated, January 12, 2004

IT WAS DEC. 21, THE REGULAR SEASON WAS WINDING DOWN, and Green Bay's playoff outlook was grim. On the day before the Packers would play the Raiders in Oakland, Brett Favre and the rest of his foursome were hustling to beat the sunset on the 18th hole of a Berkeley golf course when his wife, Deanna, phoned to tell Brett that his father had died. Irvin Favre, 58, had suffered an apparent heart attack near his home in Kiln, Miss., and died instantly. Brett was famously close to his dad, and the question was, Would Brett be too distraught to play against the Raiders?

"Never crossed my mind," Favre would later say. "What I do today is a direct result of his influence on my life. When I saw [Green Bay coach] Mike Sherman, he said, 'You want to go home, go.' I said, 'Mike, I'm playing. There's no doubt in my mind that's what he would have wanted.' "

Favre hates giving speeches, but he told Sherman that he wanted to talk to the team at its meeting that night. Favre started crying as he walked to the front of the room, then struggled to make it through the four-minute talk. "I loved my dad," he began. "I love football. I love you guys. I grew up playing baseball for my dad, and I grew up playing football for my dad. It's all I know. It's my life. I'm playing in this game because I've invested too much in the game, in you, in this team, not to play. If you ever doubted my commitment to this team, never doubt it again."

"There wasn't a dry eye in the house," Sherman says. "I've never seen a man open his soul so honestly, so completely."

On the day of the Oakland game Favre had an unusual feeling. "I've never in my life been scared before a game, but I was scared that night," he says. "Just before the game, [backup quarterback] Doug Pederson put his hand on my shoulder and said, 'Let's pray,' and I just lost it. Then Mike called everyone up, looked 'em in the eyes and said, 'We're winning this one tonight. We're winning it for Number 4, and we're winning it for Pops.' And I'm thinking, Focus. Focus. Everybody would have understood if I had played lousy, but my dad wouldn't have stood for any excuses."

Playing with a broken right thumb that had plagued him since mid-October, Favre would throw for 399 yards and four scores in the Packers' 41–7 rout. "I can't explain it," Favre says. "I'm as amazed as anybody else." The win, plus one over the Denver Broncos the next week and the Minnesota Vikings' shocking loss to the Arizona Cardinals, put Green Bay in the playoffs.

Favre's last big cry of the night came on the plane ride back to Green Bay, when he called his mother, Bonita, to see how she was doing. She told him that a couple of weeks before Irv died, he had said to a friend, "You think Brett's decided who he wants to introduce him when he's inducted into the Hall of Fame? I hope he picks me."

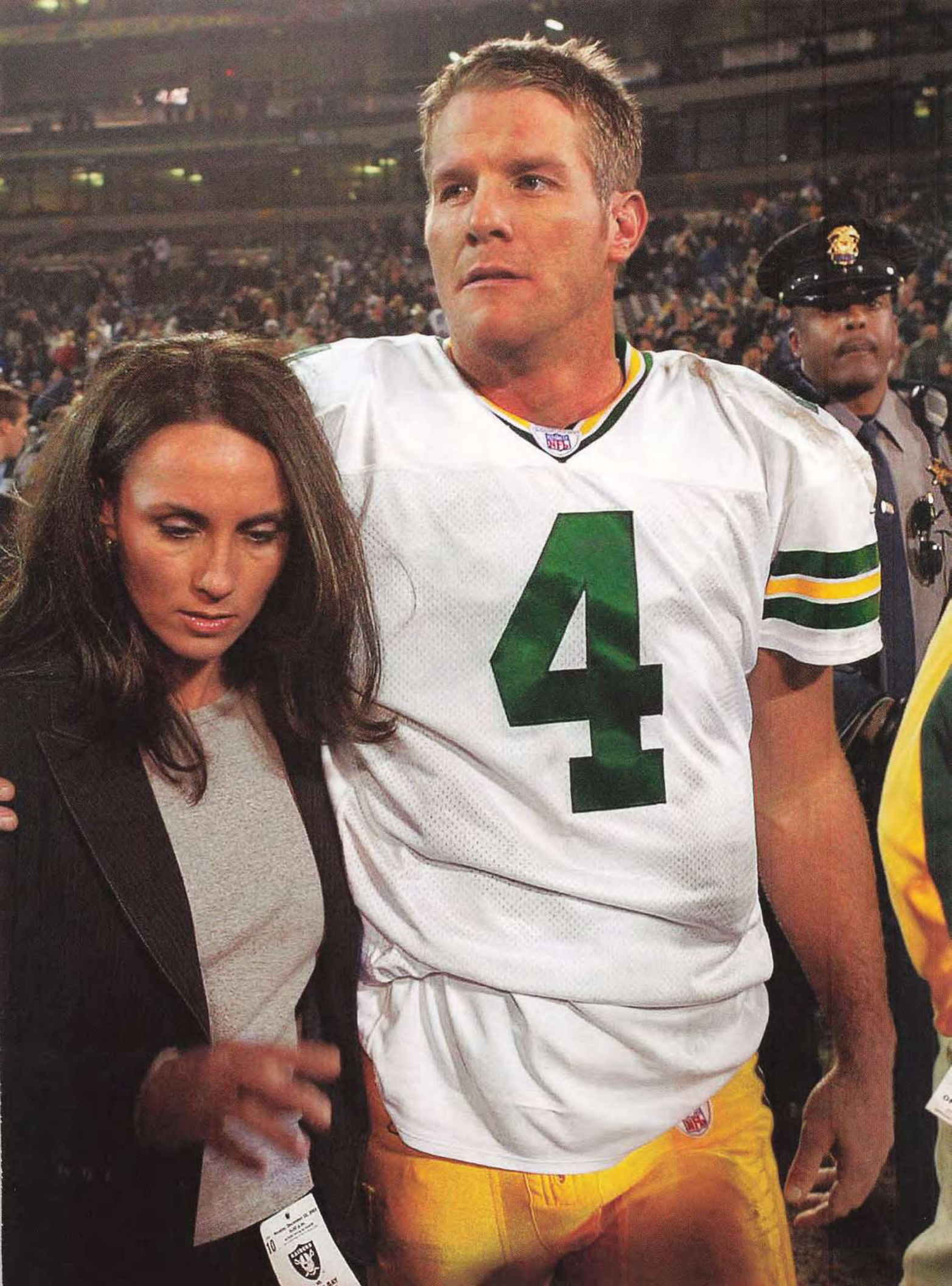
—P.K.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Broke the NFL record (13) for most consecutive postseason games with a TD pass in a 33–27 wild-card win over the Seahawks.
- Completed 308 of 471 passes, an NFC-best 65.4%.
- Received Offensive Player of the Month honors for December after completing 79 of 117 passes for 1,003 yards and 10 TDs.
- Broke right thumb on Oct. 19 but didn't miss a start and threw an NFL-best 32 TD passes.

FAVRE, WHO WEPT BEFORE THE GAME, LEFT THE FIELD WITH WIFE DEANNA AFTER THROWING FOR 399 YARDS AND FOUR TDs IN THE PACKERS' 41-7 WIN.

Photographs by JED JACOBSOHN/GETTY IMAGES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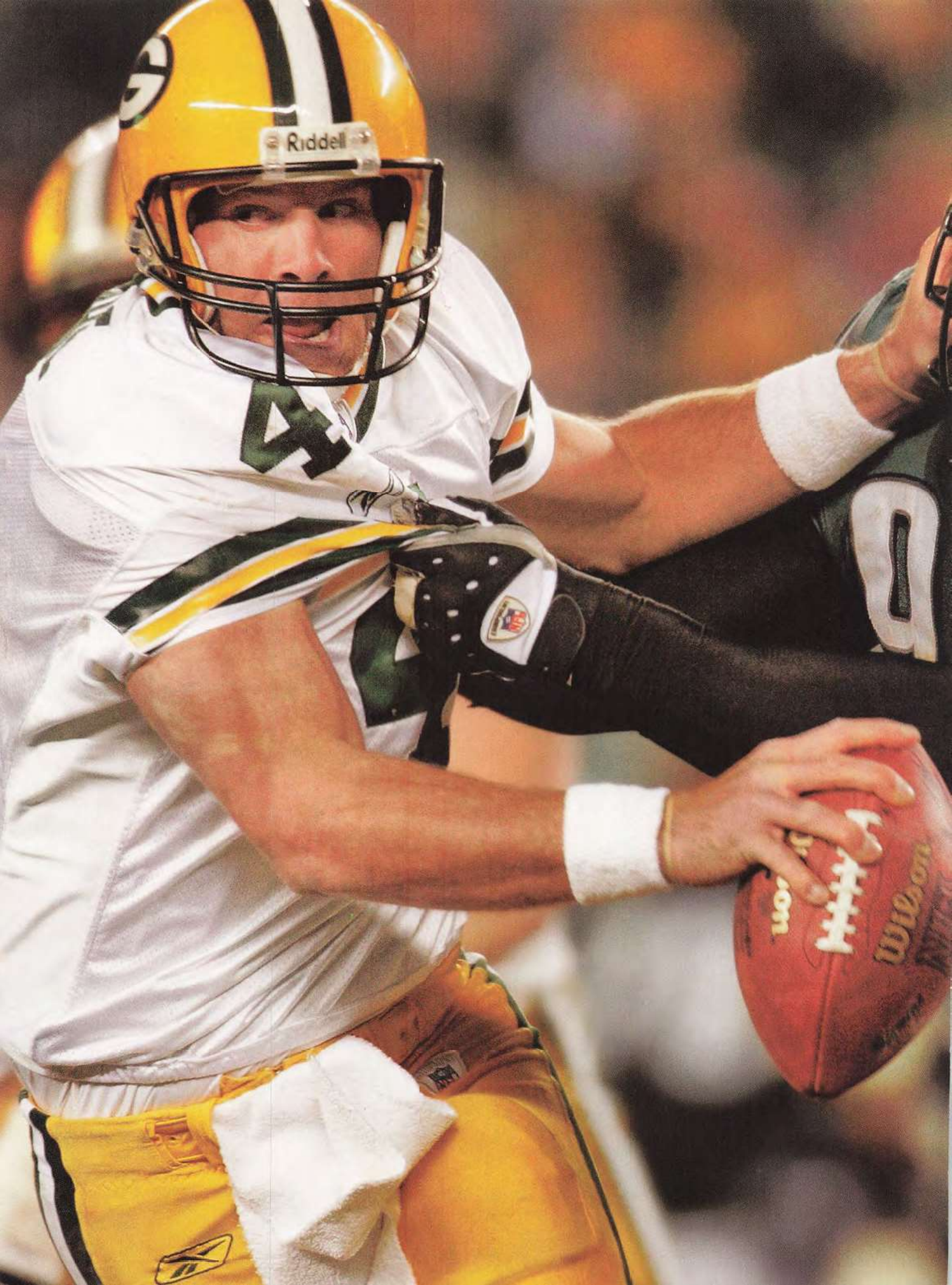
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JOHN BIEVER (RIGHT, TOP); PETER READ MILLER

PLAYING THROUGH PAIN

'04

BESET BY A STRING OF PERSONAL PROBLEMS, FAVRE FOUND HIS SANCTUARY ON THE PLAYING FIELD AS HE RETURNED THE PACKERS TO THEIR WINNING WAYS

From SPORTS ILLUSTRATED, November 22, 2004

O.K., SO THE PACK IS BACK, THE LEGEND LIVES AND ALL IS WELL in Titletown. That much we know after Brett Favre sent chills through Lambeau Field, doing that thing he does so well in leading the Green Bay Packers to a 34–31 last-second victory over the Minnesota Vikings on Nov. 14 that fully resurrected their championship hopes. Fighting through fear, grief, illness and pain, Favre coped with his problems the best way he knows how, providing 3½ hours of escapist pleasure for a community that devours it like chunks of cheddar. The 35-year-old quarterback's magic touch was never more transcendent than it has been during Green Bay's four-game winning streak over the past month.

Consider how twisted things got after the Pack dropped four consecutive games, including three at Lambeau, to fall to 1–4: "We had no motivation, no enthusiasm, and the fans were letting us hear it," said kicker Ryan Longwell, whose 33-yard field goal as time expired provided the winning margin against Minnesota. "They were screaming about Coach [Mike] Sherman, even yelling things about Number 4, saying it was time to move on."

If the man who wears that jersey, the most famous in franchise history, heard the disparaging words, he wasn't particularly fazed. The graying gunslinger had bigger worries, having lost his brother-in-law, Casey Tynes, in an ATV accident on Favre's property in Mississippi on Oct. 6, just 10 months after the death of Favre's father, Irvin. Then, on Oct. 14, Favre learned that his wife, Deanna (Tynes's older sister), had breast cancer.

Football, Favre acknowledges, is his sanctuary in times of distress. And so Favre's pain is a Packers fan's gain; the quarterback has been brilliant since learning of Deanna's illness. Against Minnesota, beginning with a 50-yard scoring strike that third-year wideout Javon Walker, an emerging star, snatched away from Vikings cornerback Brian Williams on the game's eighth play from scrimmage, Favre was in complete command (20 of 29, 236 yards, four touchdowns, no interceptions). At times it seemed like 1996 again, with Todd Rundgren's *Bang the Drum All Day* blaring as various players took turns doing the Lambeau Leap.

Favre's own celebration was more down-to-earth. After Longwell drilled the game-winner, Favre looked up to a luxury box behind the Packers' bench and waved to Deanna and their daughters, Brittany, 15, and Breleigh, 5.

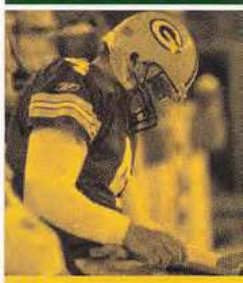
"The bottom line is, I am *old*," says Favre, still devoid of pretense after all these years and MVPs. "I'm slower, heavier and more broken down"—he raised and flexed his right arm—"but this. . . ."

Favre didn't finish the sentence, but he didn't have to. The boyish grin said it all.

—M.S.

AFTER A 1-4 START THE 35-YEAR-OLD FAVRE SHOOK OFF THE DUST AND LED THE PACKERS TO SIX STRAIGHT WINS AND A FINAL RECORD OF 10-6.

Photograph by AL TIELEMANS



HIGHLIGHTS

- Led the Packers to an NFC North Division championship for the third consecutive year.
- Threw 30 TDs and was sacked 12 times, a career-low during his tenure in Green Bay.
- Played in his 197th game as a Packer, passing Bart Starr for the most games played in franchise history.
- Helped the Packers recover from a 13–3 deficit by passing for 201 yards in the fourth quarter en route to a 16–13 win over the Texans on Nov. 21.

28
CLIFTON
76

HEINZ KLUETMEIER (2)

WORKING IT OUT '05

IN AN OTHERWISE FORGETTABLE 4–12 SEASON FOR THE 36-YEAR-OLD QUARTERBACK AND HIS TEAM, THERE WERE A FEW SIGNS THAT THE OLD BOY WASN'T DONE JUST YET

From Sports Illustrated, October 17, 2005

WE EXPECT ATHLETES TO HAVE ALL THE ANSWERS, ASSUME they know much more about themselves and their sport than what the fans could ascertain on their own. In the case of digesting a complex NFL game plan, that notion is true. But more often athletes are as clueless as the public about what fate has in store for them. The smart ones even admit it.

Like Brett Favre. On Saturday, Oct. 9, 24 hours before the game that would stop Green Bay's slide or send the Packers' season down the drain, the man who has started more consecutive games at quarterback than any other had no idea what his immediate or long-term future held.

"Is the magic over?" Favre said, voicing what every honest member of Packers Nation had been pondering for a month while the team staggered to an 0–4 start. "I think it's human to wonder that right now. I have no idea if we'll win a game this year. I really don't know how we'll play tomorrow, with half our team hurt. But I know I've probably never worked harder in a week to help this team get ready. And I also know one bad game, one bad season, will not define me as a player."

On the day before the Packers were to take on the Saints at Lambeau Field, Favre looked almost rookie fresh. There were no visible effects from a 32–29 loss to the Panthers on the previous Monday night, which had left him emotionally drained. Sure, Favre is graying, but on this Saturday he was clear-eyed and not at all downbeat about the Packers' poor start and his own inconsistent play.

Then on Sunday, the day before his 36th birthday, Favre played as if he were 26 in a 52–3 victory over the Saints. He connected on 19 of 27 passes for 215 yards, three touchdowns and no interceptions. He misfired on only one significant pass all day—underthrowing a deep post to Donald Driver that would have given him four TD tosses.

Saints quarterback Aaron Brooks helped Green Bay to an early lead by throwing interceptions on consecutive series, turnovers that the Packers converted into two touchdowns. From there Favre didn't have to take chances. The pass that smacked of vintage Favre was a 25-yard rope to Robert Ferguson in the end zone, with rookie safety Josh Bullocks draped on the receiver's shoulder. That touchdown upped Green Bay's lead to 28–3 midway through the second quarter and so energized Favre that he ran to Ferguson in the end zone, cradled his 210-pound teammate in his arms and headed for the sideline. Favre went about five yards before letting his wideout down easy. "I guess it was kind of like a honeymoon there for a minute," Ferguson said. Maybe the celebration has only started.

—P.K.

TRAINING CAMP WAS A HIGH POINT FOR FAVRE AND THE PACKERS IN '05, AS THEIR STREAK OF 13 STRAIGHT NONLOSING SEASONS CAME TO A HALT.

Photograph by JOHN BIEVER

HIGHLIGHTS

- Led the NFL with 372 completions and 607 attempts while throwing for an NFC-best 3,881 yards.
- Became the third player in NFL history to reach 50,000 passing yards, against the Browns on Sept. 18.
- Broke the NFL record for TD passes in a single stadium with his 181st at Lambeau Field.
- Ended the season on a high note by helping the Packers to a 23–17 win over Mike Holmgren's Seahawks in Green Bay.

Riddell

JONATHAN DANIEL/GETTY IMAGES (RIGHT, TOP); JONATHAN FERREY/GETTY IMAGES

FOREVER YOUNG

'06

WITH THE QUESTION OF HIS RETIREMENT LOOMING, FAVRE PUSHED BACK AGAINST AGE AND TIME AND ONCE MORE—FOR HIMSELF AND FOR ALL PACKERS FANS—FOUND JOY IN THE GAME

From Sports Illustrated, December 4, 2006

THE GREEN BAY PACKERS' RECORD OF 4–7 THROUGH WEEK 12 is fittingly ambiguous in a season this crazy, in which none of the experts have been able to predict a thing. The Packers are a little better than anyone gave them credit for being. Only the talking-head handicappers and the Hawaiian-shirt radio talkers seem disappointed that they aren't better. Or worse.

The rest of us, like Packers quarterback Brett Favre, try to take our joy in the play. The story of Favre's incomplete pass at retirement this off-season, and the upset, confusion and outrage it caused among so many strangers, has, for the most part, come and gone. But that story will return, told in the same unforgiving way, in the next season or the next or the next. Because the story of Favre's end was never just about him. It is about us.

We need our heroes and household gods forever young, forever strong, forever smart or forever beautiful. Because we ourselves are not. The end of an elite athlete's career at 25 or 35 or 40 mirrors too perfectly the diminishments and compromises we will see all too well in ourselves at 55 or 65 or 70. The aches and pains and confusion, the missteps, the injury and illness and loss, the memories flown and the flowering of cowardice in the face of uncertainty, all the greatness so far behind you.

Young poets mock the inexorable unwinding of time, until, if they're lucky, they become old poets. Old poets are smart enough to mock only themselves.

Because maybe worse than bad eyes, bad ears, bad back, bad hair, bad heart, is bad faith. Doubt. The delicate stress fracture of the will and the hairline crack along the backbone. This is how you calibrate your own descent, in the sad calculus of who you once were but can never be again.

Which is why the images of Johnny Unitas at the end, or Joe Namath, or Muhammad Ali, or Joe Louis, or any of hundreds and hundreds of others, were too much for us. Not because we couldn't muster sufficient sympathy, but because we had altogether too much empathy. To see their sad end warned us too vividly of our own.

There will come a time when Brett Favre can no longer play. This is not that time. But at the end of this season—or the next or the next—he will step away at last, having earned the peace of a perpetual off-season.

But until that moment, Brett Favre will be throwing, in a way, for us all. Throwing hope forward, in a single clean step or with a motion as rushed and off-balance as the rest of us. Banking on the past while trying to read a second into his future, drilling clean arcs on our behalf into the weakening light and the rising odds, every throw a moment for hope, a defiant line, bright in the air, against the infinite and inevitable. —*Jeff MacGregor*

FAR FROM DONE, FAVRE, HERE HOISTING RECEIVER DONALD DRIVER AFTER DRIVER'S TD CATCH AGAINST MIAMI, CARRIED THE PACKERS TO AN 8–8 SEASON.

Photograph by ALLEN EYESTONE/PALM BEACH POST/ZUMA PRESS

HIGHLIGHTS

- Became the NFL's alltime completions leader, breaking Dan Marino's record of 4,967.
- He led the Packers finish the season with four straight victories to bring the team's record to .500.
- Performed his first Lambeau Leap after a one-yard TD run against the Cardinals on Oct. 29 (a 31–14 win).
- With numbness in his passing hand from an elbow injury, completed 22 of 36 passes for 266 yards against Seattle.

FAVRE
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94
TAUSCHER
65

JEFF GROSS/GETTY IMAGES (RIGHT, TOP); ALLEN FREDRICKSON/ICON SMI

THE BEST FOR LAST

'07

THE INCOMPARABLE FAVRE PLAYED HIS FINAL PACKERS SEASON THE WAY HE PLAYED THE 15 BEFORE IT—AS A RECORD BREAKER, A MASTER OF HIS POSITION AND A WINNER

From Sports Illustrated, October 8, 2007

WHAT BETTER WAY FOR ONE OF THE BIGGEST RECORDS IN America's favorite game to fall than for Brett Favre to improvise a play at the line and execute it with the flair that has made him America's favorite quarterback? It helped to see the action unfold live in Minneapolis because the clip aired later on highlight shows did not do justice to Favre's 421st career touchdown pass, the one that moved him past Dan Marino atop the alltime list. The replay had Favre lasering a 16-yard touchdown pass to wideout Greg Jennings. But that brief clip didn't reveal the full story of the play—nor why it exemplified Favre's unflagging mastery of his position.

With eight seconds left on the play clock, Favre called an audible, at one point slapping tight end Donald Lee on the butt to confirm he had the new play, dropped back into the shotgun, signaled for the snap and, with linebacker E.J. Henderson barreling in from Favre's left, threw a tight spiral that hit Jennings between the 8 and the 5 on his white jersey. "It took me a few seconds," Favre said, "to realize that was the record."

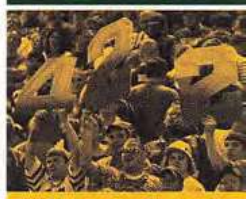
It's all so unexpected—Green Bay undefeated and leading the NFC North, the team's eight-game winning streak, and Favre, who'll be 38 on Oct. 10, turning back the clock in his 17th NFL season. Or is it? Perhaps we shouldn't be surprised, given how he rededicated himself to the job after announcing in February 2007 that he was not ready to retire. For four months at home in Mississippi during the off-season, Favre had a live-in personal trainer, and he arrived at camp as flexible and fit as he'd been at any point in his career. Because Favre, who stopped drinking in 1999, lives a workaday life in Green Bay during the year—"He just doesn't go out, at all, anymore," wife Deanna says—the game occupies more of his time than ever.

Each Monday he has the video staff load his laptop with the previous four games of the upcoming opponent. On Tuesday, the players' day off, Favre goes to the offices at Lambeau Field for four hours, to get a head start on the game plan—and to plant a few seeds in coach Mike McCarthy's head. "He'll give me all kinds of ideas and plays, and I'll have to say no, no, no," says McCarthy. "But there's a few every week I really like. I don't want to speak for him, but I think he sees the light at the end of the tunnel. He wants to make sure he leaves nothing to chance. In the last few weeks, all anyone's talked about is the record. Not with him. The big thing with him is January football. You look in his eyes, and you can see the wars he's been through, trying to get to more January football. It's all he cares about right now."

For now Favre is the feel-good story of the season. He knows it. As he walked off the Metrodome field, he waved to the fans, an adoring crowd in a stadium that has not been friendly to him. Then, struggling to be heard over the din, he said, "I guess I can still do it." So we see. —P.K.

WHILE BREAKING MARINO'S TD RECORD, FAVRE LED THE PACKERS TO A 23-16 VICTORY FOR GREEN BAY'S EIGHTH STRAIGHT WIN.

Photograph by JOHN BIEVER



HIGHLIGHTS

- Broke Dan Marino's career records for passing TDs and yards, finishing with 442 TDs and 61,655 yards.
- With a win over the Giants in Week 2, surpassed John Elway as the winningest quarterback in NFL history, finishing with 160 victories.
- Led the Packers to a 13–3 record, the NFC North title and a berth in the NFC Championship Game.
- Named Sports Illustrated's 2007 Sportsman of the Year.

A MAN IN FULL

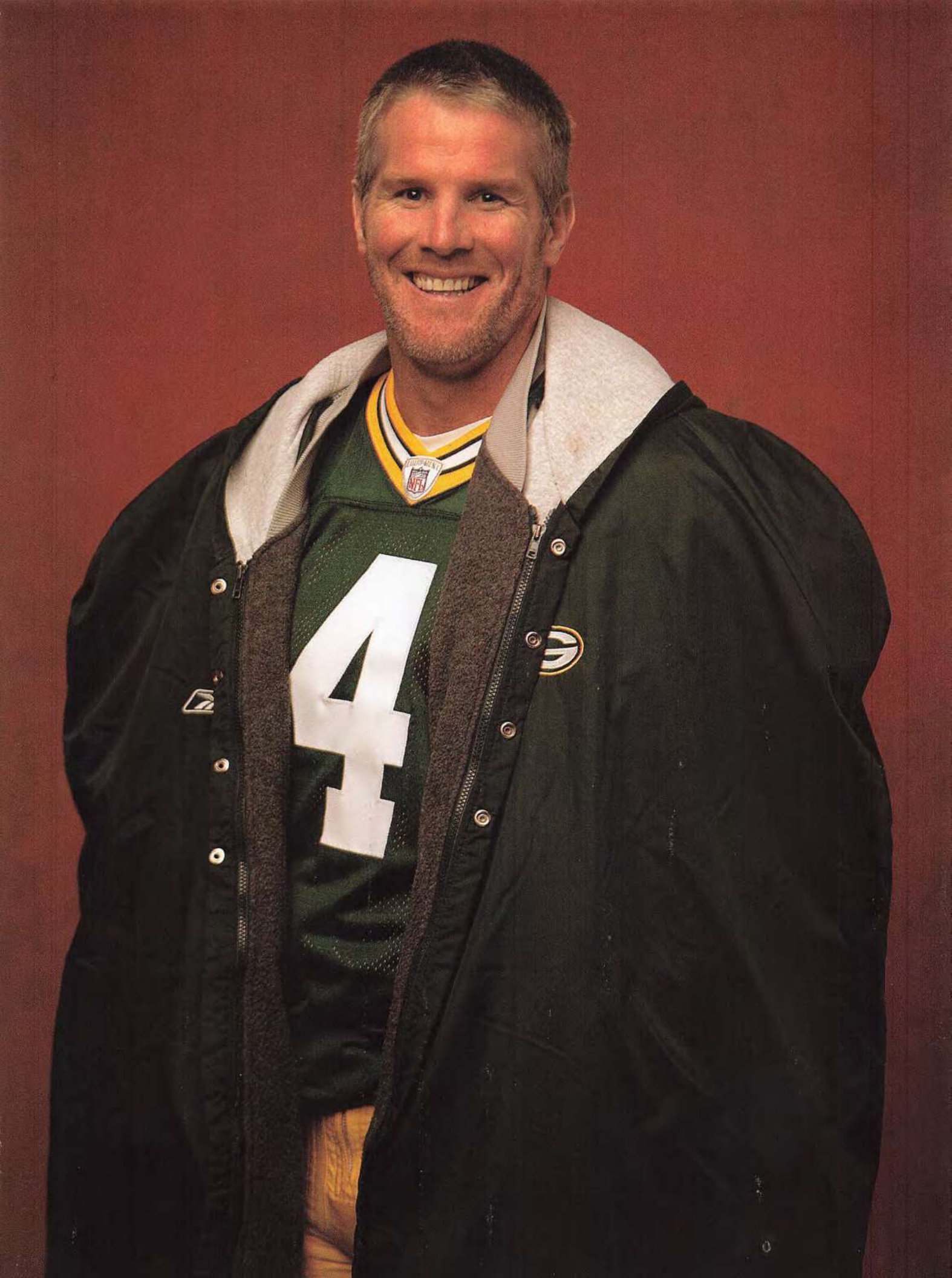
AT 38 THE PACKERS' IRON MAN CLOSED OUT AN EXTRAORDINARY CAREER WITH ONE OF HIS FINEST SEASONS. HIS PASSING WAS MORE

FAVRE

PRECISE, HIS LEADERSHIP MORE EVIDENT THAN EVER. BUT THE REAL MEASURE OF FAVRE'S STATURE IS IN THE DEVOTION HE INSPIRES IN THOSE HE TOUCHES AND IN HIS DEDICATION TO IMPROVING THEIR LIVES

BY ALAN SHIPNUCK

Photograph by WALTER IOOSS JR.



FAVRE
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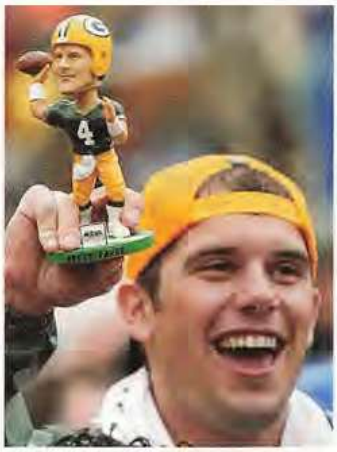
From Sports Illustrated, December 10, 2007

THERE IS NO HAPPIER PLACE THAN GREEN BAY, WIS., ON A SUNDAY evening after the Packers have won. The beer tastes better, the girls are even prettier, and no one seems to notice the bite in the air. In a town defined by its team, civic temperament can be quantified on a scoreboard. On Nov. 18, in the moments after the Packers had defeated the Carolina Panthers 31–17 at Lambeau Field, the parking lot was alive with merriment. Kids in number 4 jerseys and GOT BRETT? sweatshirts chased footballs with abandon, tailgaters handed out bratwurst right off the grill, and one optimistic gent tried to sweet-talk the more attractive passersby into adding to the impressive collection of donated bras he had strung up on a flagpole.

The epicenter of Green Bay's game-day good cheer is adjacent to Lambeau, just across Holmgren Way, a block over from Lombardi Avenue: Brett Favre's Steakhouse, located at 1004 Brett Favre Pass. The restaurant ("Where you are the MVP!") is a 20,000-square-foot temple to the Packers' quarterback, and following the Panthers game Favre's extended family had gathered in a private back room for a celebration of its own.



DEANNA SAYS PACKERS FANS TREAT THE FAVRES LIKE FAMILY BECAUSE "THEY'VE ALL HAD THEIR OWN SIMILAR STRUGGLES."

Brett's wife, Deanna, was there, looking glamorous in a long coat and high-heeled boots. Even before her memoir about beating breast cancer hit *The New York Times*'s best-seller list, she was the second-biggest celebrity in Green Bay. Favre's mother, Bonita, was holding court at one of the half-dozen tables, her throaty laugh audible over the din. Brett's sister, Brandi, was cooing over her newborn daughter, Myah, while his brothers, Scott and Jeff, were busy refereeing their young sons, who were creating a ruckus by playing tackle football with an empty water bottle. Also enjoying the spread of steak and crawfish and all the fixings were various cousins, neighbors and hangers-on. In this loud, lively gathering only one person was missing—the man for whom the restaurant and the street are named.

"[Favre] means everything to these people," Driver says. "He's the symbol of the franchise, of the whole town."

In his 16th winter in Green Bay, Favre has turned into Gatsby, throwing a party he no longer enjoys. While his family and friends were reliving every detail of his three-touchdown performance against Carolina, Favre was at home a couple of miles away, stretched out on his couch, watching that day's NFL highlights and cuddling with his lapdog, Charlie. By the ostentatious standards of modern-day celebrity, Favre's house is modest, but it suits him fine. On this Sunday evening it was dark and quiet, giving him some precious hours to decompress. There was a time when Favre never skipped a chance to celebrate—"Hell, I always had to be the life of the party," he says—but now solitude is what he thirsts for.

"As I've gotten older, I've become more of a loner," he says. "You've just been out there in front of 80,000 screaming people, everyone watching every move you make, the pressure of all that—it's fine and dandy for three hours, but afterward. . . ." Here Favre takes a big, billowing breath. "I used to thrive on that adrenaline. I never wanted it to end. Now I need to get back to reality. Like sitting on the couch with Charlie."

If Favre is weary, it's only because he has given so much of himself to Green Bay through the years. "He means everything to these people," says Donald Driver, who caught Favre's passes for nine seasons. "He's not only our leader—he's the symbol of the franchise, of the whole town. There's a generation of fans in Green Bay who don't know this team ever existed without Brett."

When Favre decided to return for the 2007 season, even die-hard Cheeseheads must have been hoping only that he would not tarnish his legacy. What no one expected was that Favre would reinvent himself yet again, enjoying one of his best years at age 38 while cajoling a talented but callow team to a stunning 10–2 record. [The Packers would finish the season 13–3 and reach the NFC Championship Game. Along the way Favre passed three significant milestones for quarterbacks—touchdown passes (442), passing yards (61,655) and victories by a starter (160).]

But one achievement above all others speaks to what Favre is made of: his Ripkenesque streak of 253 consecutive starts at quarterback—more than five seasons ahead of the next player on the list, Peyton Manning. Favre has rarely been flawless (after all, he leads the NFL in lifetime interceptions, with 288), but he's always shown up. Through pills and booze, through cancer and car crashes and heart attacks, he has

JAMES V. BIEVER (LEFT); HEINZ KLUETMEIER

DURING HIS 16 YEARS IN GREEN BAY, FAVRE MADE ONLY ONE LAMBEAU LEAP, IN OCTOBER 2006, AGAINST ARIZONA.

played on. Once reckless on and off the field, Favre matured before our eyes while never losing his boyish love for the game. Every weekend the whole of Green Bay may have lived and died on Favre's rocket right arm, but his greatest legacy lies in how many people he has touched between Sundays.

THE INTENSITY of Favre's relationship with Packers fans goes far beyond mere longevity. Since his arrival in Green Bay in 1992 (by way of a trade with Atlanta), his success on the field has been dampened by personal setbacks and heartache, including his two stints in rehab; the death of his father, Irvin, in 2003, and of Deanna's younger brother, Casey Tynes, in '04; and then, just four days after Casey's funeral, Deanna's learning that she had breast cancer. Always the Favres were overwhelmed by the outpouring in Green Bay—bags of letters, innumerable prayer circles and kind wishes murmured in the grocery aisle.

"People here treat us like family, and I think they care for us like family," says Deanna. "Because of everything we've been through, they don't see Brett as untouchable or as some kind of superhero. And they've been through it with us. The fans here feel close to Brett because they've all had their own similar struggles. Nothing against Tom Brady or Peyton Manning, but I'm not sure their fans relate to them in the same way."

Once reckless on and off the field, Favre matured before our eyes while never losing his boyish love for the game.

Though Favre has never had difficulty connecting with people, he admits that early in his career he was too busy having a good time to reach out to others. Deanna had become pregnant when she was 19 and did much of the early parenting of daughter Brittany so that Brett could concentrate on football. Deanna and Brittany continued to live in Favre's tiny hometown of Kiln, Miss., during Favre's first few seasons in Atlanta and Green Bay, leaving him unchaperoned. "It was out of control for a while," says Scott. "We'd go into a bar and just take over the place. Brett would be on top of the bar, pouring drinks. The people loved it, of course." Then, in '96, an addiction to the painkiller Vicodin led to a 46-day stay at the Menninger Clinic in Topeka, Kans. "I was able to see some things a little more clearly," Favre says of his time there. "I realized I had become sidetracked in a lot of important ways." In July '96, shortly after he completed rehab, Brett and Deanna were married. That year he also started the Brett Favre Fourward Foundation, with a charter to provide aid to disabled and disadvantaged children in Mississippi and Wisconsin.

Over the last decade the foundation has given out $4 million to dozens of charitable organizations. One recent beneficiary was the Miracle League of Green Bay, to which Favre donated $100,000 to help build a baseball facility with a specialized wheelchair-friendly artificial surface. In addition to the field, Favre's money went toward a high-end public-address system and the retrofitting of the playground equipment to make it more accessible to those with disabilities. "These kids always had to sit and watch before," says Bruce Willems, whose 16-year-old daughter, Kyla, is a regular in the Miracle League. "Now they get to play, and you can't believe what it does for their self-esteem."

In fact, some of the kids have developed big league attitude. Eleven-year-old Jacob Van Den Berg "won't go to bat until his name is announced on the P.A. system," says his father, Jeff. "The fact that Brett Favre helped build this place, that's a big deal to him."

Kids like Kyla and Jacob are kindred spirits with the children of Kiln's Gaits to Success, which provides therapeutic horseback riding for the disabled. With a stable of horses and 10 lush acres, it is not a cheap operation, and Carolyn Rhodes, the program's director, says simply, "Without Brett, we would not exist."

FAVRE HAS ALWAYS BEEN ABLE TO CONNECT WITH PEOPLE, FANS AND TEAMMATES–SUCH AS BACKUP AARON RODGERS (12)–ALIKE.

JOHN BIEVER (2)

The link between Kiln and Green Bay became more explicit after Hurricane Katrina ravaged the Mississippi coast in 2005. Bonita's house was flooded by the storm surge and had to be rebuilt from the ground up. In the aftermath of the storm, Favre used a couple of Packers press conferences to appeal for help for his home state. An account was set up in Green Bay for contributions, and within eight weeks upward of a million dollars had poured in. Says Mike Daniels, president of Nicolet Bank, which administered the account, "We had packages arriving full of change, with letters in crayon that said, 'Dear Mr. Favre, this is from my piggy bank. Your friends need it more than I do.' "

The Door County Gulf Coast Relief Fund was also born in the wake of Katrina, though its roots could be traced to Super Bowl XXXI, when the Packers beat the New England Patriots in New Orleans, about an hour's drive from Kiln. During the week of the game many of the Green Bay faithful made the pilgrimage to Favre's boyhood home, and the Broke Spoke, Kiln's main bar, became a sort of down-market Graceland.

IN JANUARY 1998 FAVRE PREPARED FOR HIS SECOND SUPER BOWL BY–AS ALWAYS–JOKING WITH TEAMMATES.

Riddell
PACKERS
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PACKERS
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PACKERS
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It was there that Pete D'Amico of Green Bay first met Big Irv, and a long-standing kinship with Kiln was born. Three days after Katrina struck land, D'Amico and his friend Tony Anheuser were in a borrowed truck, making the 22-hour drive to Mississippi, packing donated clothes, food, water and a couple of hundred steaks, which they cooked up every night in front of the Broke Spoke and handed out to whoever was hungry.

Since then the relief efforts have continued to grow; Green Bay volunteers have made more than 20 trips to Kiln to help rebuild homes. Last October, during the Packers' bye week, 26 Cheeseheads traveled to Kiln. "My whole life has become about giving back the blessings I've been given," says Anheuser, 66, a retired home-furnishings retailer. "It's through Brett and the connection we have to Kiln that I've found my purpose."

When Favre hears these stories, he can only shake his head. "It's pretty hard to fathom," he says of his impact. But he does much more than just raise money and inspire others from afar. At a fund-raiser for Green Bay's Brian LaViolette Scholarship Foundation, Favre came on stage to play drums with the house band. "When that happened, a bunch of us old ladies in the crowd started screaming," says Sue LeTourneau, who helps run the scholarship program named for her late nephew, who died in a swimming accident.

FAVRE MET WITH MAKE-A-WISH CHILDREN, INCLUDING ANNA, ALMOST EVERY FRIDAY THE PACKERS WEREN'T ON THE ROAD.

Many athletes give time to the Make-A-Wish Foundation; for Favre it's a regular part of his workweek. So strong is the demand to meet him among Make-A-Wish kids with life-threatening medical conditions that Favre schedules a visit nearly every Friday when the Packers are not playing an away game. "It's an honor to be asked," he says, "but I'm not going to lie—it's hard. There are times when it takes a lot out of me. These kids are so cool, but you can't ignore what they're up against and what their families are going through."

In September 2004 Favre met with a six-year-old from Neenah, Wis., named Anna Walentowski. She was suffering from Alexander disease, also known as leukodystrophy, an extremely rare type of degenerative brain disorder for which there is no known cure. By the time her visit was arranged, Anna was on a feeding tube for 20 hours a day. In the preceding months she had repeatedly been rushed to the hospital with spasms of her upper respiratory system, which made breathing nearly impossible. "It was a dark, dark time in our lives," says Anna's father, Jeff. "Our little girl was deteriorating pretty rapidly."

Anna's parents feared she would not be strong enough to make the trip to the Packers' practice facility, but she rallied for the big day. Favre had recently been banged up, and the first thing the little pixie in a Packers cheerleading outfit said to him was, "How's your thumb?" The two bonded instantly. Anna's mother, Jennifer, remembers Favre giving her daughter hug after hug and gently helping Anna get in and out of her stroller, so the two could play catch with a Nerf football and later eat lunch with the team.

Before saying goodbye, Anna gave Favre a prayer card with her picture on it. Unbeknownst to the Walentowskis, Favre taped it to his refrigerator door that night, and it stayed there for the rest of the season. "Every day we looked at that picture and prayed for Anna and her family," Deanna wrote in her book, *Don't Bet Against Me!*

In the years since Anna's visit her condition has improved dramatically. This is no doubt due to specialized care made possible by the evolving understanding of leukodystrophy. Anna's parents think the meeting with Favre also has had something to do with it. "That one day they spent together never really ended," says Jennifer. "We would often talk about the visit and look at the photos, and she would be asked all the time to tell the story. It became a big part of her life."

> Anna's parents think the meeting with Favre has had something to do with her condition's dramatic improvement.

The tale took another turn when Deanna's book was published, in September 2007, including the passage about Anna, a girl she knew only from the photo on the fridge and the effect she'd had on her husband. The Walentowskis were unaware of their cameo in the book until a friend called to tell them about it—and to say that Deanna was in nearby Appleton at that moment for a book signing. The family hustled over to meet Deanna. Now nine, Anna still faces serious medical challenges, but against all odds she has continued to get better. "She looked so good, so happy," says Deanna. "When I told Brett, it touched him. He didn't really have any words. He was pretty choked up."

COREY WILSON/GREEN BAY PRESS-GAZETTE (LEFT); COURTESY OF THE WALENTOWSKI FAMILY

FAVRE'S POSTFOOTBALL LIFE WILL INVOLVE MORE TIME WITH DEANNA (LEFT), BRITTANY (RIGHT) AND BRELEIGH.

FAVRE ALSO forms a palpable brotherhood with his teammates. No Packer felt this more profoundly than receiver Koren Robinson, who became Favre's personal reclamation project. A first-round pick of the Seahawks in 2001, Robinson has struggled with alcohol abuse for several years. As a Minnesota Viking in '05 he was voted to the Pro Bowl as a kick returner, but in August '06 the team cut ties with him after his second arrest for drunken driving. Green Bay took a chance and signed Robinson the next month, but four games into the '06 season he was suspended by the NFL for a year because of a third violation of the league's substance-abuse policy, the fallout from one of his incidents in Minnesota. Robinson was banned not only from games but also from practicing with the Packers and using any team facilities. When the suspension was handed down, Favre blasted the NFL, accusing the league of turning its back on a player who he thought could clearly benefit from structure and support.

No one expected that Favre would enjoy one of his best years while cajoling a talented but callow team to a stunning record.

In the year that Robinson was out of football, Favre took it upon himself to provide that safety net, regularly calling Robinson to check up and lend an ear. "For a guy of his stature to reach out, he didn't have to do that," says Robinson, who was reinstated in October 2007 and finished with 21 catches in nine games. "To know he cared so much for me, it was a huge motivation for me to better myself and correct the things in my life that needed to get right."

Favre's compassion was born of his own experiences. "From a substance-abuse standpoint, I was probably worse off than Koren," he says. "People don't realize that, because I was never suspended. But I've done all kinds of drugs, I've drunk too much—the only difference between me and Koren is that I didn't get caught. But I've been there, and I know how lonely it can be."

An NFL locker room is among the most macho places in sports, but Robinson's voice catches when he talks about his former quarterback. "I am so blessed to have a friend like Brett Favre," he says. "A lot of what keeps me going now is that I want him to be proud of me."

"I'm already proud of him," says Favre. "I couldn't care less if he ever catches another pass. The way he has put his life back together is much bigger than that."

SIMON BRUTY (LEFT); JEFF HANISCH/US PRESSWIRE

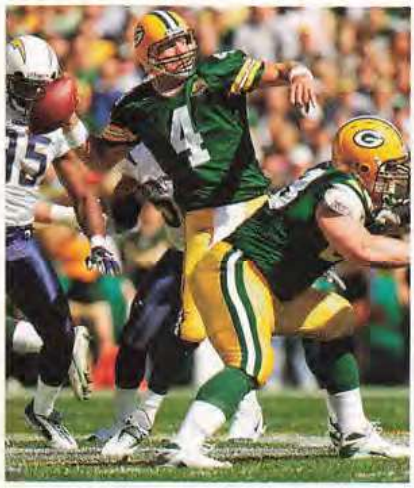
FAVRE'S FINAL VICTORY CAME FITTINGLY ON THE FROZEN TUNDRA IN THE DIVISIONAL PLAYOFF GAME AGAINST SEATTLE.

On Robinson's right biceps is tattooed MATTHEW 28:20. That scripture appropriately captures Favre's relationship with Robinson and the rest of his teammates: "[Teach] them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

THE PEOPLE of Green Bay have been girding themselves for the very end of the age. Ask folks for their favorite Favre memory, and you'll get countless anecdotes but rarely any hesitation. So many elite athletes captivate with their otherworldly physical gifts, but the common theme among the Favre highlights is the human element.

Jennifer Walentowski, Anna's mother: "In the Super Bowl against the Patriots, Brett threw a beautiful touchdown in the very beginning of the game, and he was so excited, he started running around the field. He had taken off his helmet, and he had both arms in the air, and there was such genuine joy on his face, such realness. Gosh, I'm tearing up right now just thinking about it."

IN HIS LAST SEASON FAVRE BROKE HALLOWED RECORDS FOR PASSING TOUCHDOWNS AND YARDS, AND VICTORIES BY A STARTER.



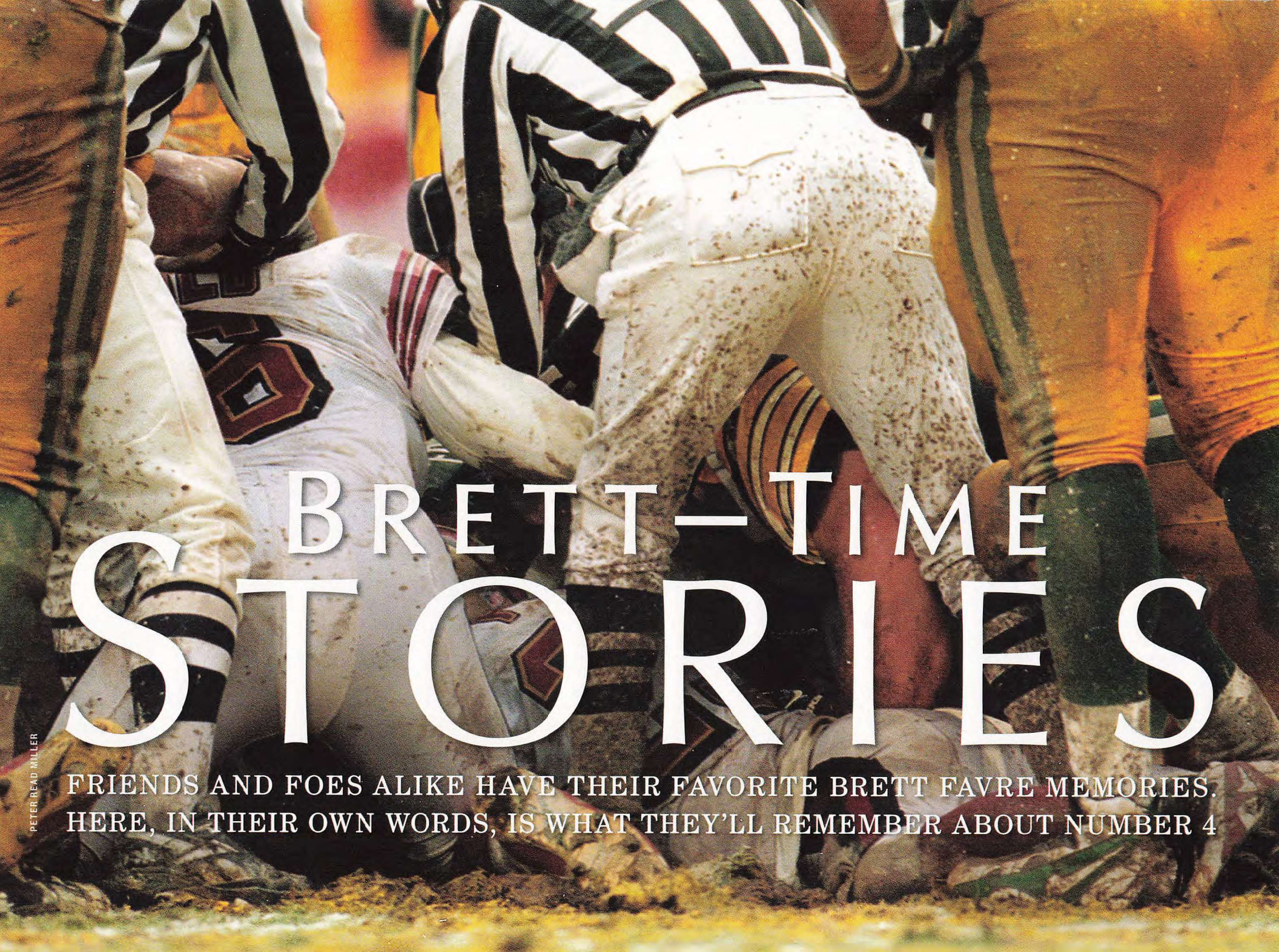
Doug Phillips, whose daughter, Carley, participates in the Miracle League: "He hurt his ankle pretty bad against the Vikings [in 1995]. No one knew if he would play the next game [against Chicago]. He was on crutches all week, doubtful right up to kickoff. When he ran out of the tunnel at Lambeau, that was the loudest explosion I have ever heard in my life. And of course Brett threw five touchdowns that day."

Pete D'Amico, cofounder of the Door County Gulf Coast Relief Fund: "I lost my father a month before Brett's dad died. That Monday-night game against Oakland, the day after Big Irv died, I was crying that whole game. Just bawling. I know a lot of other people were too, for their own reasons."

Ask Favre for his own favorite memory, and he is quiet for a moment. "I've got so many plays running through my mind," he says, finally. "The funny thing is, it's not only about the touchdowns and the big victories. If I were to make a list, I would include the interceptions, the sacks, the really painful losses. Those times when I've been down, when I've been kicked around, I hold on to those. In a way those are the best times I've ever had, because that's when I've found out who I am. And what I want to be." □

FAVRE

UGLY PLAYING CONDITIONS IN JANUARY 1997 DIDN'T STOP FAVRE FROM GETTING HIS LAUGHS AT LAMBEAU, AS ONE 49ERS LINEBACKER RECALLS.



PETER READ MILLER

BRETT—TIME STORIES

FRIENDS AND FOES ALIKE HAVE THEIR FAVORITE BRETT FAVRE MEMORIES. HERE, IN THEIR OWN WORDS, IS WHAT THEY'LL REMEMBER ABOUT NUMBER 4

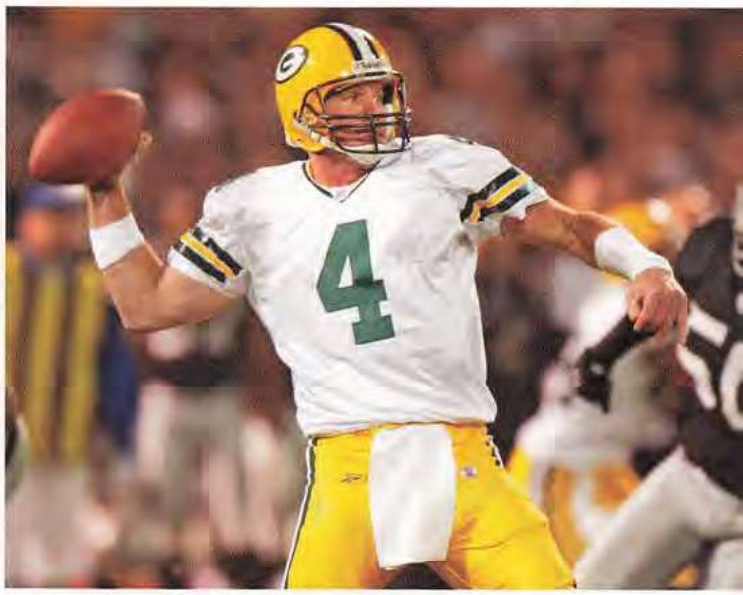
52
52

DID YOU HEAR THE STORY ABOUT THE TIME BRETT FAVRE WAS LAUGHING so hard at the line of scrimmage during a playoff game that he had to call a timeout? Or the one about the time Favre pulled a sideline prank on Andy Reid? Seventeen seasons in the NFL have generated many Favre-ite tales, but they all paint a picture of a fun-loving but tough quarterback who was respected by players on both sides of the line of scrimmage.

WE WERE playing at Denver [in '98]. It was a preseason game, and we had the ball to start the game. So we're standing on the sideline, and I give Brett the play and then look around to make sure we have the right personnel on the field. Now the clock's running, and he's just standing there, and I'm yelling at him, "Come on, let's go." Then Mike [Holmgren] starts yelling in my ear, "Come on! What's going on? Where is he?" So I look around, and now I can't see him.

So I told Mike, "I have no idea where he is. Last I saw him, he was right next to me." Now Mike's screaming at me, we take a penalty, and I look around and Brett's standing there laughing and yelling, "I got you! I got you!" He was behind me, kind of hiding behind my left side. It turns out he was miked for the whole game, and he thought it would be funny to start the game by putting on a show, and he did. He knew he wasn't going to be benched. He got my rear end chewed out a little bit for that and had some fun. But that was Brett. That's the kind of thing he did all the time.

—Andy Reid, Eagles coach; Packers assistant from 1992 through '98



FAVRE WAS ALL SMILES WITH REID AT THE START OF A PRESEASON GAME BUT NOT DURING AN EMOTIONAL GAME AGAINST OAKLAND.

MY ROOKIE year [2000] we were at Minnesota late in the year. Big game. At some point in the second half we were facing third down, and [center] Frank Winters misses a linebacker coming on a blitz. Brett gets sacked, but instead of jogging off the field, he turns and chucks the ball at Frankie. And Frankie says, "Well, get rid of the damn ball faster next time!" The whole team was laughing. It kind of loosened us up, and we went on to win.

—Mark Tauscher, Packers offensive tackle

THERE WERE about eight years in which I didn't let him write a check. It all started because one time he needed to pay his trainer. On the PAY TO line he had written BRETT, then scribbled it out and put his trainer's name. On the next line, where you're supposed to spell out the amount, he put 600 with a big line after it. Then at the bottom he had forged my name! It looked like a little kid had stolen the checkbook! I was in church when I discovered the carbon copy from the check, and I died laughing. I showed it to my sister, and she giggled hysterically too. We almost got kicked out of church. I have to say, it's that stuff that makes him so lovable.

—Deanna Favre, Brett's wife

AS WINTERS (52) LEARNED, MISSING A BLOCKING ASSIGNMENT COULD LEAD TO A FAVRE-INDUCED RIBBING.

FROM LEFT: TONY TOMSIC/WIREIMAGE.COM; TODD WARSHAW/GETTY IMAGES; JED JACOBSOHN/GETTY IMAGES

With Favre "they have won a lot more than they have lost, and they have done it with great style," Doyle says.

MY FONDEST memory was the game on Monday night against the Raiders after his dad [Irvin] passed away. He tried to talk [to the team] the night before, and he really couldn't say much, but we knew where he was coming from. From that point on we knew what we had to do as a team. He knew we were going to go out and give everything we had for him.

—Ahman Green, Texans running back; Packers running back from 2000 through '06

I'VE SAID many times it's a lot easier to govern this state when the Packers are winning than when they're losing. And with Brett Favre, they have won a lot more than they have lost, and they have done it with great style.

—Jim Doyle, Wisconsin governor

IN '99, when I was quarterbacks coach, three of the first four games were comebacks in the final minutes. The one that stands out was against Tampa Bay. There's about a minute left, and we call this play where, if the rush comes, Brett's supposed to check down to the back. Of course, Tampa comes with everything they've got, but Brett just stands in there and throws a strike to Antonio Freeman for the winning touchdown, just as John Lynch and half the defense hit him in the jaw. On the sideline Brett's a little woozy—he's on oxygen—and I go up to him and say, "What happened to the check down?" He says, "Dammit, I forgot all about that. But, hey, I made the throw." That's Brett Favre in a nutshell. He'll take the beating, but he'll always make the throw.

—Mike McCarthy, Packers coach

IT WAS 1999, and we [the Bucs] are playing a nationally televised game at Lambeau. It's a huge game for me and for the franchise. We hadn't beaten the Packers there in a long time [since '89]. I took the team down, and we scored a touchdown in four plays to take the lead with 1:45 left. I had a 27-yard scramble on the drive, and we scored on the road in front of a big crowd. The drive was everything you wanted from a quarterback. We had a really good defense, so I think we've won. Then Favre comes back and throws the winning, toe-tapping touchdown to Antonio Freeman at the back of the end zone with [virtually] no time left. We had a blitz on, and Warren Sapp and Derrick Brooks are right in his face, and he got the ball off anyway. It was the most crushing defeat I've ever experienced, and I've had a lot of them.

—Trent Dilfer, 49ers quarterback

> "I got his autograph on a jersey last year, and that thing will go in a frame in my house, and I'll treasure it forever."

AS AN offensive lineman, whenever we [the Packers] scored, you knew you had to have your head on a swivel because you knew he was going to jump on a lineman.

—Mike Wahle, Seahawks lineman; Packers lineman from 1998 through '04

YOU WATCH him on television, and you say, "O.K., he made a play." But when you see him in person, it's kind of like Michael Jordan. When Brett drops back, you just expect him to complete the pass. And he's as good as I've seen at that position in my years in the league.

—Shannon Sharpe, former Broncos and Ravens tight end

I HAVE spent the better part of my NFL coaching career working on game plans to beat him. There is no player I respect more. He is one of the alltime greats to ever play in the NFL. He was a tremendous leader and the ultimate competitor on Sundays.

—Lovie Smith, Bears coach

FOR THE Bears game in November 1995 he had a severely sprained ankle. I don't think too many people thought he'd play. He did everything possible that week, and he threw five touchdowns. That speaks a little bit about his durability. Another favorite memory would be his Super Bowl win. On the [Packers'] second play he audibled to a post route to Andre Rison and hit him for a touchdown. . . . With Brett, there probably should be a rule that you have to put *great* in front of his name—the Great Brett Favre—because that's the standard he's set.

—Marty Mornhinweg, Eagles assistant; Packers assistant from '95 through '96

THE GREATEST thing about him was, it never seemed to be about him. He would have the best time [playing], and all he wanted was for the team to win; that was it. And you knew it the first time he ever took the field—he was going to have a good time. Everybody was going to respond to him. It was all about winning for him.

—Dick Jauron, Bills coach; Packers assistant from 1986 through '94

WHAT I'LL always love and appreciate about him is that he was a gunslinger who didn't change his game to appease his critics. I got his autograph on a jersey last year, and that thing will go in a frame in my house, and I'll treasure it forever. You talk about security—that jersey will have security like the *Mona Lisa* has around it.

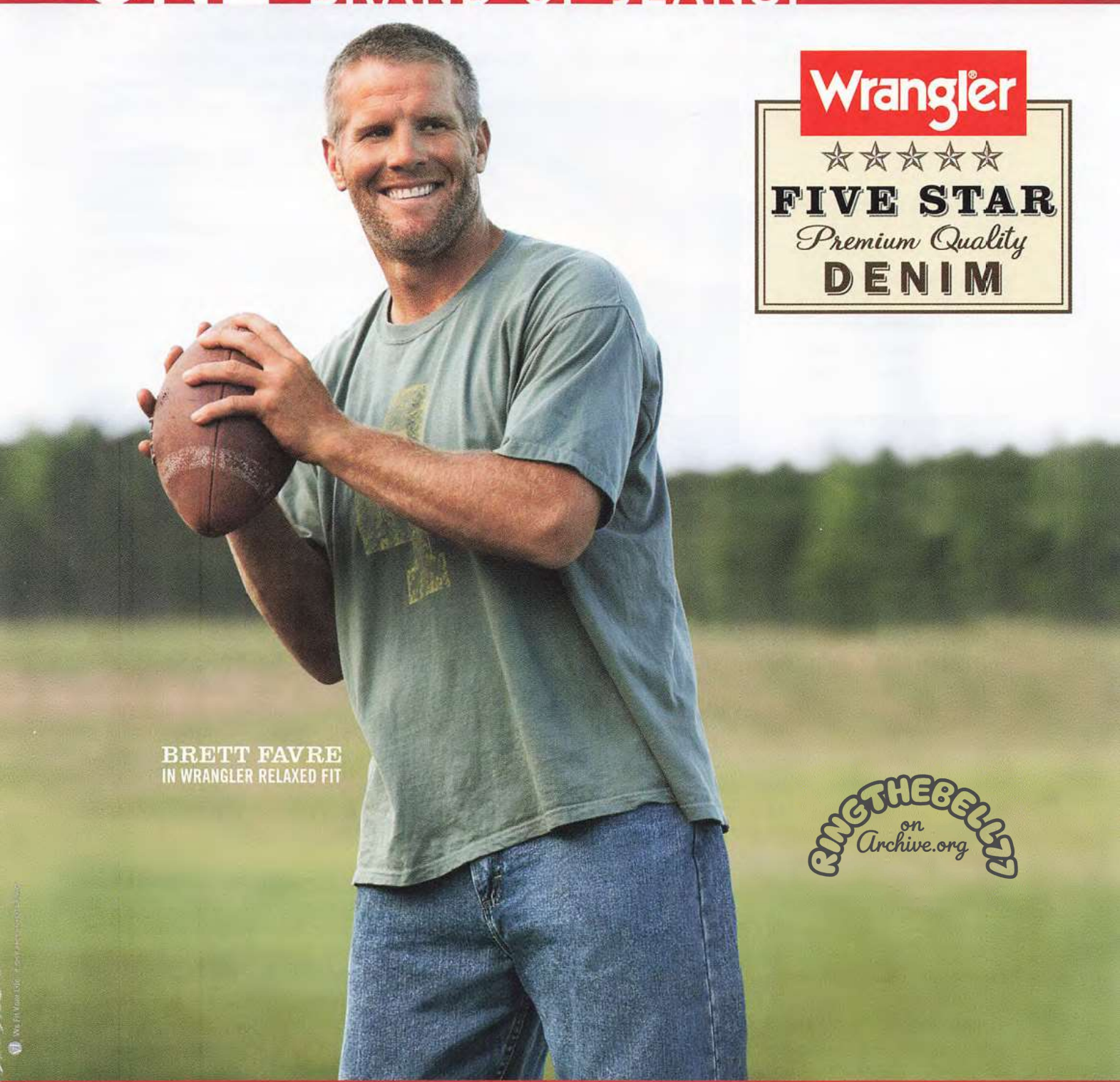
—Mike Rucker, Panthers defensive end

McCARTHY AND DILFER HAVE DIFFERENT TAKES ON FAVRE'S MIRACULOUS COMEBACK AGAINST THE BUCCANEERS IN 1999.

ANDY MANIS/AP

17 SEASONS
442 TOUCHDOWNS
61,655 YARDS

ONE BRAND OF JEANS.



RINGTHEBELL on Archive.org

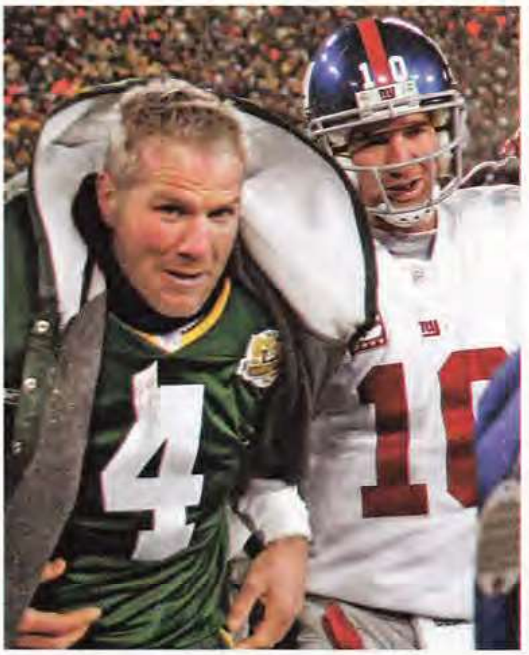
WRANGLER CONGRATULATES BRETT FAVRE ON A FIVE STAR CAREER.

WE [THE 49ERS] played them in the playoffs in the '96 season. It was one of those days at Lambeau—cold, muddy. We were playing in slop and freezing rain. At one point he tried to get us to jump offside on fourth-and-short. The defensive linemen in front of me were just about to jump on his hard count. So I had to get behind them and grab them by the butt so they wouldn't jump. Favre saw me do this and started cracking up. He was laughing so hard, he had to call timeout because the clock was running down.

—Gary Plummer, former Chargers and 49ers linebacker

MY FAVORITE moment is from that Monday night against the Raiders [after Irvin died]. Before the game I went to talk to Brett in his hotel room. He was hurting, obviously, but said he was going to play because we were his family too. It was pure love, pure brotherhood.

—Donald Driver, Packers receiver



MANNING ADMIRED THE PACKERS' GREAT GROWING UP AND LIKE FAVRE PLAYED QUARTERBACK FOR A MISSISSIPPI COLLEGE.

I'M GOING to ask the video guys to make a highlight reel of my almost-sacks of Brett. I didn't get him, but I got some good hits, and I got close. I was just talking to [teammate] Israel [Idonije] earlier and said, "I can't believe I didn't get this guy before he got out of the league."

—Adewale Ogunleye, Bears defensive end

WE GAVE him his first opportunity to shine. We were leading the Packers [in 1992] and made the mistake of knocking Don Majkowski out of the game with an injury. Favre came off the bench and threw a couple of TD passes in the fourth quarter and beat us [24–23]. He started for them the next week and stayed there until now.

—Mike Brown, Bengals president

AS A competitor? There was no one like Brett Favre. I remember playing him once and seeing him jump in his offensive linemen's faces. He just wanted everyone always to be their best. He's the competitor I always want to be.

—Tommie Harris, Bears defensive tackle

FAVRE BROUGHT personality to the game and to our league. Above all else, what Brett Favre has always been is a team guy. He always did what was in the best interests of his team, and I think that's what he's demonstrating right now. He was the classic example of the professional football player who was going to lead his team under any and all circumstances, as evidenced by the tremendous record he set in terms of the number of consecutive starts.

—Tom Coughlin, Giants coach

I WAS with Coach Holmgren when Brett started playing. I remember Majkowski, the Majik Man, got injured, Brett went into the game, and it was history after that. He went in and won games during that first year he played. To look at him now, you can't be anything but proud for him in seeing these accomplishments happen to a young man as great as Brett Favre is. He's a great person, and I have nothing but respect for him.

—Ray Rhodes, Texans assistant; Packers assistant from 1992 through '93 and head coach in '99

I TOOK a lot from Brett: working hard, taking care of the body. Every time I would go in [the team facility] in the morning, he would be on the StairMaster or the treadmill. He practiced hard. He studied. But what I took most from Brett was how he would compete in the game. He would go out there and give absolutely all he had and would make some incredible plays.

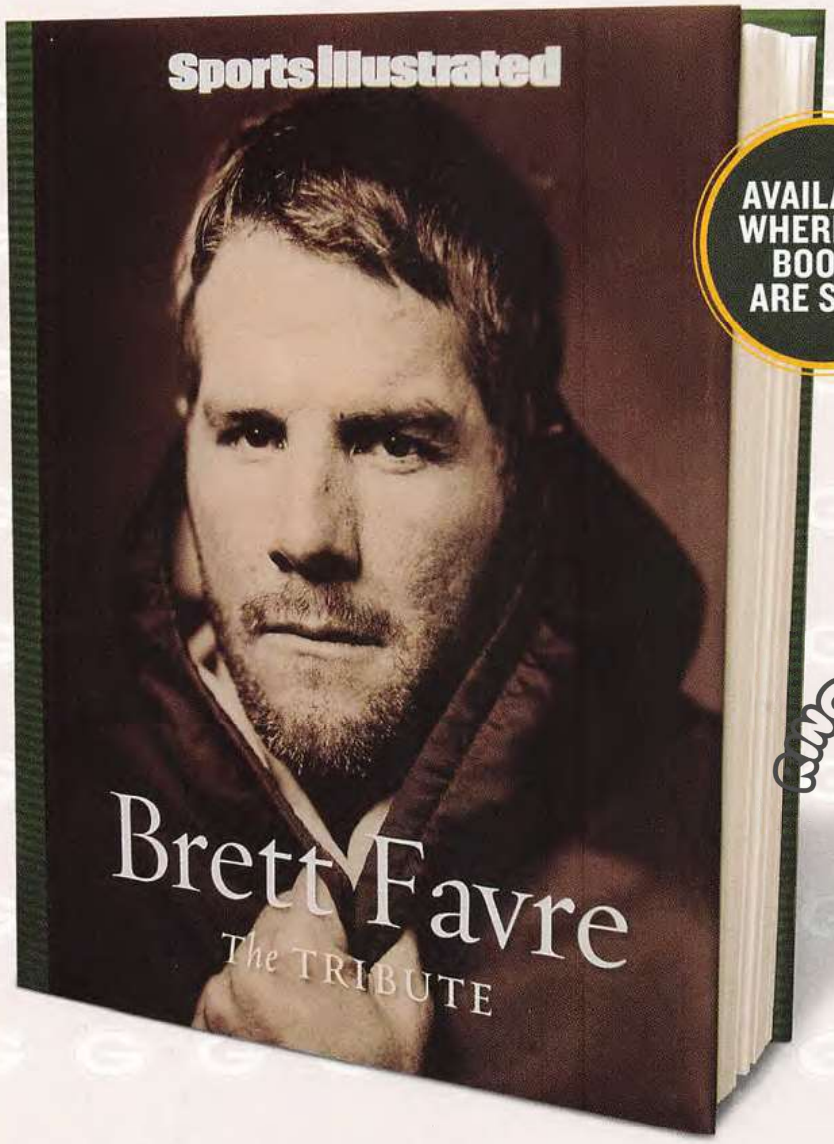
—Mark Brunell, Redskins quarterback; Packers quarterback from 1993 through '94

"He was going to play because we were his family too," Driver says of the 2003 Oakland game. "It was pure love, pure brotherhood."

GROWING UP, I always admired Brett Favre. It's been great to watch him because he has so much fun playing the game. He's also a wonderful person. He's been great to me and my family and has always been so supportive of me. It was nice to see him and play against him in those two games [in 2007], especially in the NFC Championship Game. It's really an honor and will always mean a lot to me that I played on the same field as he did in his last NFL game.

—Eli Manning, Giants quarterback

JEFF HAYNES/REUTERS



AVAILABLE WHEREVER BOOKS ARE SOLD

RINGTHEBELL
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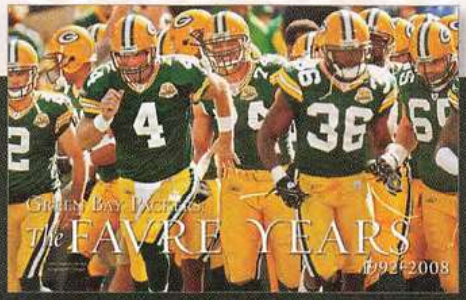
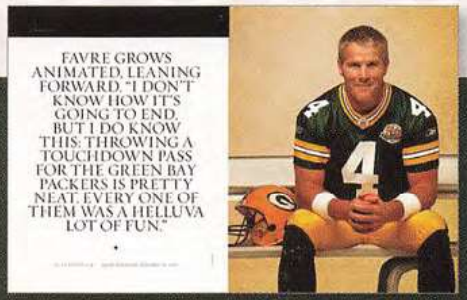
The Best of Brett Favre from the Pages of SPORTS ILLUSTRATED




FAVRE GROWS ANIMATED, LEANING FORWARD. "I DON'T KNOW HOW IT'S GOING TO END, BUT I DO KNOW THIS: THROWING A TOUCHDOWN PASS FOR THE GREEN BAY PACKERS IS PRETTY NEAT. EVERY ONE OF THEM WAS A HELLUVA LOT OF FUN."

SPORTS ILLUSTRATED *presents the definitive story of an American icon's remarkable football career—including his record-breaking 2007 season—in a stunning 224-page collection of stories and photographs.*

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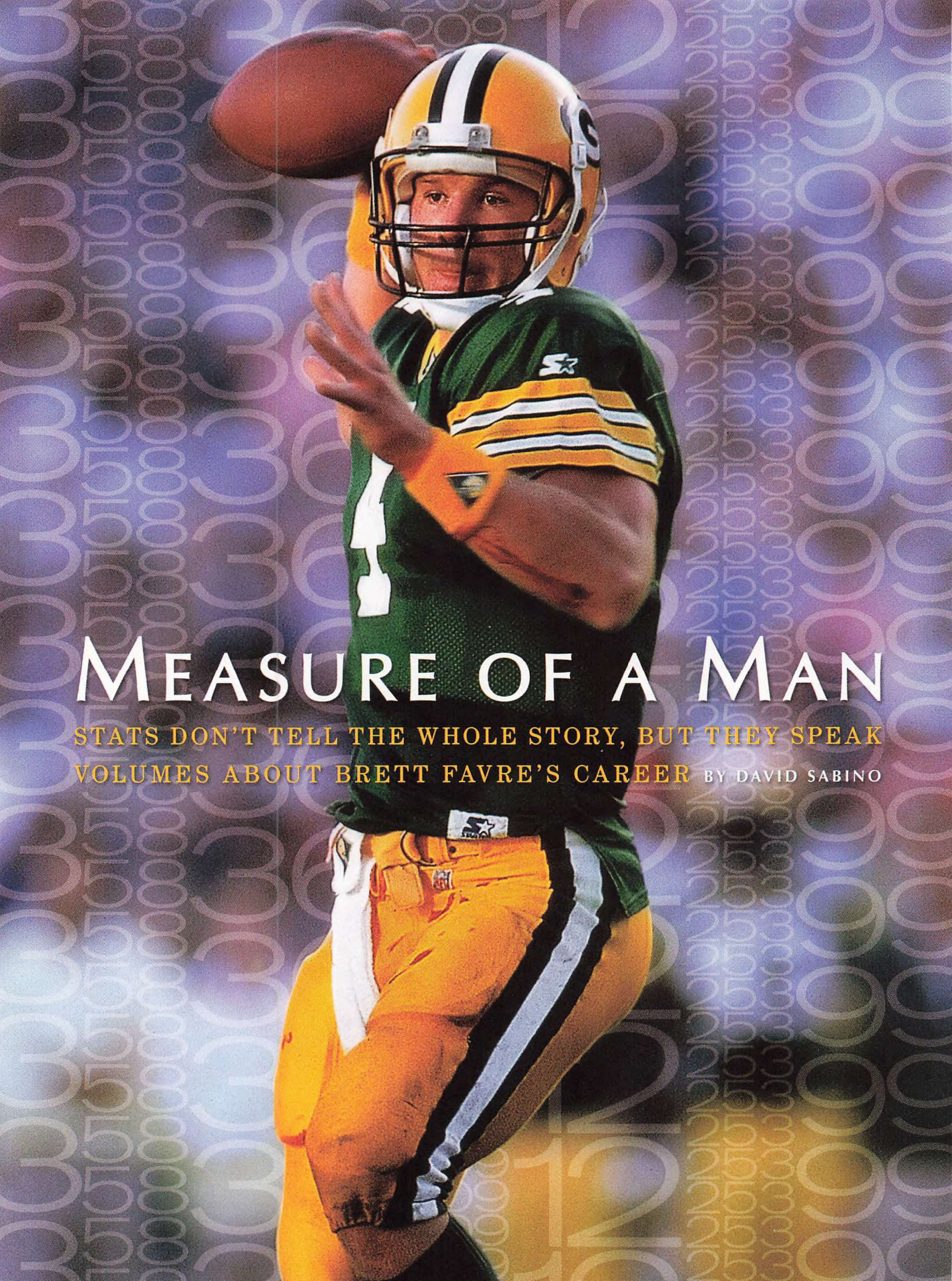


MEASURE OF A MAN

STATS DON'T TELL THE WHOLE STORY, BUT THEY SPEAK VOLUMES ABOUT BRETT FAVRE'S CAREER

BY DAVID SABINO

BY THE NUMBERS

4 SEASONS (1995–97, 2003) Brett Favre led the NFL in touchdown passes.

15 STRAIGHT seasons he played in each of his team's games. The only other NFL player with a longer streak is defensive lineman Jim Marshall of the Minnesota Vikings, with 19 seasons.

16 SEASONS as a Packer, tied with Bart Starr for the longest service in Green Bay history.

253 CONSECUTIVE games started, from Sept. 27, 1992, through Dec. 30, 2007.

212 QUARTERBACKS who started for the 31 other NFL teams during Favre's streak.

160–93 PACKERS' record in games Favre started. The 160 victories are the most for a starting QB. The .632 win percentage is the best in the NFL during that period.

12 CONSECUTIVE seasons with 20 or more touchdown passes, from 1994 through 2005, an NFL record.

1ST RANK among all NFL quarterbacks in career passing attempts (8,758), completions (5,377), passing yards (61,655), TD passes (442), 3,000-yard passing seasons (16) and consecutive postseason games with a TD pass (18).

3 NFL MVP awards (1995–97), the only three-time honoree in the Associated Press award's 51-year history.

99 YARDAGE of his longest pass, a TD to Robert Brooks in 1995, one of 10 passes for 99 yards in NFL history.

11 QUARTERBACKS who served as Favre's backup in Green Bay and went on to start games for other NFL teams, including Aaron Brooks, Mark Brunell, Matt Hasselbeck and two-time NFL MVP Kurt Warner.

36 CONSECUTIVE games with a TD pass, from 2002 through '04, the second-longest streak in NFL history.

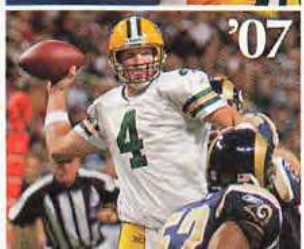
209 TOUCHDOWN passes at Lambeau Field, the NFL record for most scoring throws at one venue.

58 REGULAR-SEASON and playoff games with at least 300 passing yards. Favre also had a 402-yard game against the Bears in a 30–17 loss at Soldier Field in 1993.

19 CAREER games with at least four TD passes, second to Dan Marino's record of 21.

-7 YARDAGE on Favre's first NFL completion. The receiver was Favre himself, who caught the batted ball out of midair before being tackled for a loss.

FAVRE



MILESTONES

► APRIL 21, 1991
The Falcons select Southern Miss quarterback Brett Favre in the second round of the NFL draft, the 33rd pick overall.

► NOV. 10, 1991
Favre throws his first four NFL passes as a Falcon against the Redskins at RFK Stadium in Washington, completing none to Atlanta receivers—and two to Redskins defenders.

► FEB. 10, 1992
After barely 10 months with Atlanta, Favre is traded to the Packers for a first-round pick previously acquired from the Eagles.

► SEPT. 20, 1992
Just a week after making his Green Bay debut, Favre is forced into action after an ankle injury to starter Don Majkowski. He proceeds to throw for 289 yards and two TDs in a come-from-behind win over the Bengals. His first of 442 career TD passes goes to wide receiver Sterling Sharpe.

► FEB. 7, 1993
At 23 years, three months and 28 days, Favre *(far left)* becomes the youngest quarterback to play in the AFC-NFC Pro Bowl, dating to 1971.

► DEC. 3, 1995
Favre throws his 100th career TD pass in his 62nd game, to running back Edgar Bennett in a 24–10 win against Cincinnati.

► JAN. 26, 1997
The Packers win a Super Bowl championship for the first time in 29 years, beating the Patriots 35–21.

► NOV. 15, 1998
Favre throws his 200th career TD pass in his 107th game, to tight end Tyrone Davis in a 37–3 defeat of the Giants.

► OCT. 13, 2002
The Packers QB completes his 300th career TD pass, to running back Ahman Green, in a 28–10 win over the Patriots, his 167th game.

► SEPT. 24, 2006
In his 228th career game, a 31–24 win over the Lions, Favre joins Dan Marino in the 400 TD–pass club with a scoring toss to rookie wideout Greg Jennings.

► DEC. 17, 2006
Favre becomes the NFL's alltime completions leader, surpassing Marino.

► SEPT. 16, 2007
Favre leads the Packers to a 35–13 win over the Giants to pass John Elway on the alltime wins list, with 149.

► SEPT. 30, 2007
Against the Vikings, Favre becomes the NFL's alltime touchdown pass leader with the 421st of his career, again surpassing Marino.

► OCT. 14, 2007
Favre gains the dubious distinction of being the NFL's alltime interceptions leader, breaking the previous record of 277 held by George Blanda.

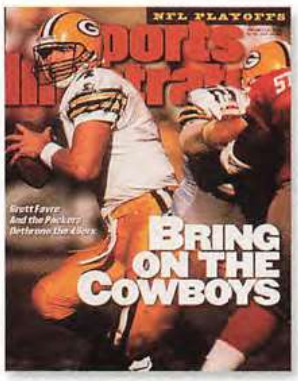
► DEC. 16, 2007
Favre throws for 227 yards against the Rams and becomes the NFL's alltime passing yardage leader, surpassing (who else?) Marino, who threw for 61,361 yards.

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: JOHN BIEVER; JIM GUND/GETTY IMAGES; NFL/WIREIMAGE.COM; JOHN IACONO; MATTHEW STOCKMAN/GETTY IMAGES; CHRIS MCGRATH/GETTY IMAGES; DILIP VISHWANAT/GETTY IMAGES

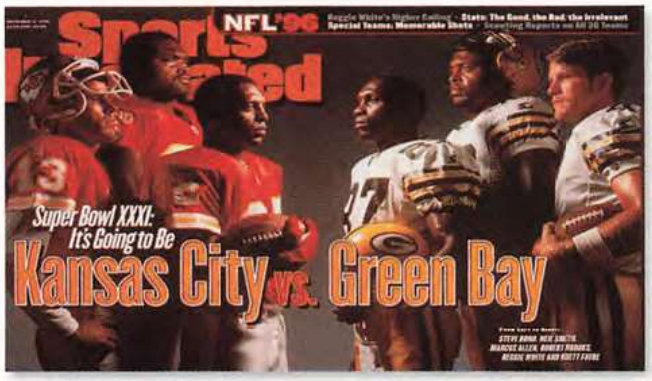
COVERING THE QUARTERBACK

THROUGHOUT HIS CAREER, NUMBER 4 WAS AT THE FOREFRONT FOR SI

COMPILED BY TRISHA BLACKMAR

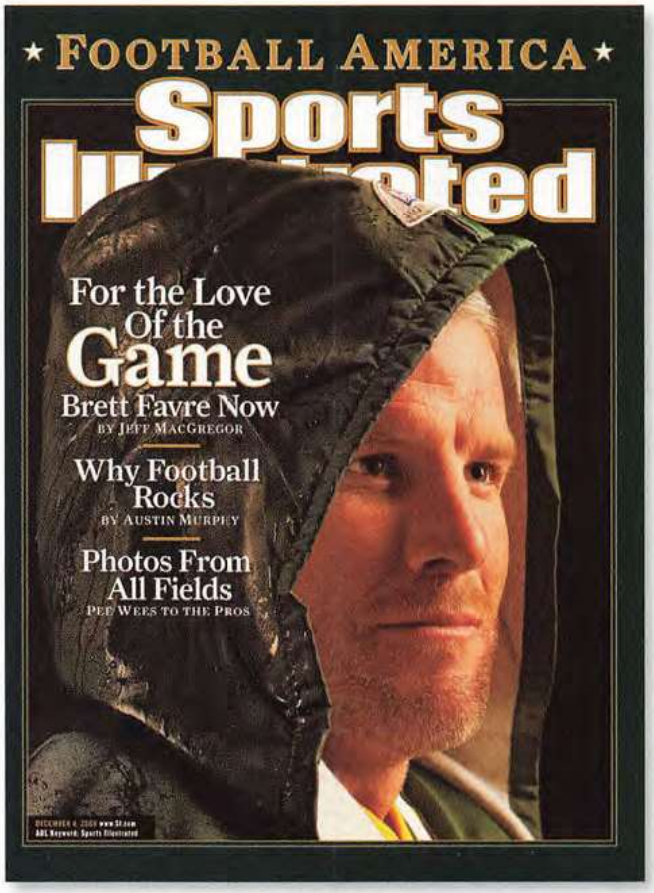


JANUARY 15, 1996
FAVRE AND THE PACKERS BEAT THE DEFENDING CHAMPS.

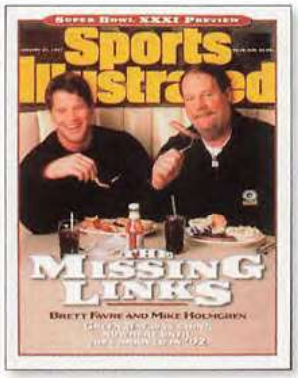


SEPTEMBER 2, 1996
ONE HALF OF SI'S PREDICTION HELD, AS GREEN BAY WON ITS FIRST SUPER BOWL IN 29 YEARS.

DECEMBER 16, 1996
THE PACK WOULD ROLL THROUGH THE PLAYOFFS.

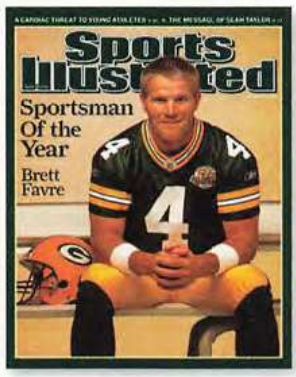


DECEMBER 4, 2006
IN SI'S VIEW, FAVRE WAS THE NFL'S HUCK FINN, A BAREFOOT SCAMP, FOREVER YOUNG AND RECKLESS.

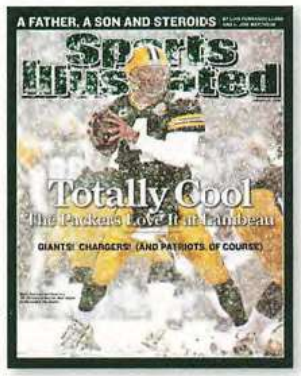


JANUARY 27, 1997
MIKE HOLMGREN DINED WITH FAVRE BEFORE THE BIG GAME.

DECEMBER 23, 2002
A REJUVENATED FAVRE LED THE PACKERS TO A 12-4 MARK.



DECEMBER 10, 2007
SI HONORED FAVRE'S PASSION, BOTH ON THE FIELD AND OFF.


A FATHER, A SON AND STEROIDS
Sports Illustrated
Totally Cool
The Packers Love It at Lambeau
GIANTS! CHARGERS! (AND PATRIOTS, OF COURSE)

JANUARY 21, 2008
FAVRE SNOWED THE SEAHAWKS IN THE PLAYOFFS.

CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER: JOHN W. MCDONOUGH; RICHARD CORMAN; AL TIELEMANS; WALTER IOOSS JR.; PETER READ MILLER; WALTER IOOSS JR. (2); SIMON BRUTY

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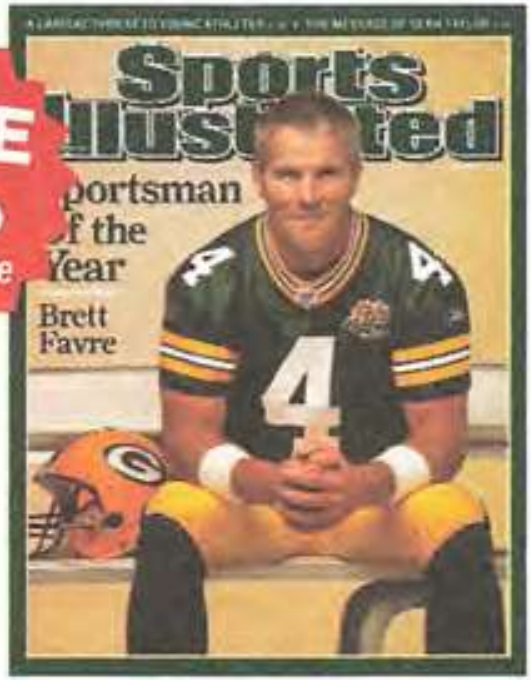

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